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THE AUTHOR IN HIS MOUNTAIN RETREAT WHERE THESE  
STORIES WERE WRITTEN

# WARPED IN THE MAKING

*Crimes of Love and Hate*

BY

H. ASHTON-WOLFE

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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS



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TO  
FREDA, JIM BANNISTER  
AND ALL MY GOOD FRIENDS OF  
THE PARIS SÛRETÉ  
I DEDICATE THIS BOOK  
MAY IT RECALL THE DAYS OF HARD WORK  
AND EXCITEMENT





## PREFACE

SINCE the war I have ceased to be exclusively engaged in criminal investigation abroad, but my profession has brought me constantly in touch with the great criminal investigation centres of the world, and even when merely acting as interpreter in the various courts, at home and on the Continent, I have many times become almost intimate with some of the more interesting criminals; among whom the best remembered is perhaps that strange Frenchman Pierre Vaquier, the Byfleet poisoner.

It was quite by chance that I became involved in scientific investigation and began to study the psychology of crime. Probably because I come of a mixed ancestry, many languages are as mother tongues to me, and although I am a Londoner I have always been a wanderer from land to land, roaming the earth since my boyhood. My father, Dr. W. Wolfe, of Edinburgh, went to America when a young man and became an officer in the Eighth United States Cavalry, stationed at Fort Union, near Pueblo, New Mexico. It was in the West that he met my mother, the daughter of a Scottish rancher who had chosen a bride from the old Spanish stock, as so many did in the wild pioneer days. Thus, although I was born in London during a visit of my parents to England, I spent my early days on the vast ranges of Colorado and Arizona, and was taught how to ride and shoot by the red-skinned

Sioux warriors, who, strangely enough, enjoyed showing a white boy their tricks. Until I was fourteen, I went to school in Denver, and later completed my education in France and Germany, taking a degree in Heidelberg. In this way a love of travel and the craving for excitement and danger were stimulated in me from childhood. After my first introduction in Monte Carlo to the forces which wage unceasing warfare against the shadowy underworld of crime, I realised that in their ranks there was a possibility of escaping from the dreaded monotony of a life of routine.

Whilst a pupil and assistant of Dr. Bertillon in Paris, I found the study of criminology so absorbing, so exciting, and so full of opportunities for encountering the weird and fantastic, that I threw myself heart and soul into the work. My knowledge of languages and familiarity with most of Europe's great cities caused me to be chosen very often when investigations were necessary in other countries. I have in this manner been enabled to collect a sheaf of unusual cases, many of which are certainly well known.

The stories which I have selected for this series can be found in the official records, only one or two details have been rearranged, in order to avoid giving pain and reopening old wounds.

I have myself taken part either in the investigation or the final trials of the criminals. Several of the cases I have specially selected because of the ingenuity displayed both by the law-breakers and the investigators.

Truly the science of crime has developed and has armed itself with modern weapons. But equally so has the knowledge of those who are responsible for the protection of the community expanded; until the laboratory, equipped with camera, microscope, and chemical retorts, has become their greatest ally.

Famous men, such as Dr. Bertillon, Professor Lombroso, Dr. Edmond Locard, and many others, have made the study of crime and criminals and the analysis of both the absorbing pursuit of their lives.

Yet little is known of this science. It has been thought wise not to inform the potential or actual wrongdoer of the dangers with which his career is studded.

That is one point of view! If, however, the possible criminal (or even the habitual offender) knew more of the odds against the probability that any crime can remain unpunished for long, he would think twice before committing one.

The certainty of detection acts as a more powerful deterrent than the vague fear of uncertain punishment. My experiences taught me that very quickly.

When Dr. Bertillon perfected his anthropometrical department, which was at once copied in every country, and it became known that a criminal could be traced by his finger-prints, the belief that henceforth criminals would wear gloves was generally accepted by the public. It is the rarest thing, however, that he does so. The simple explanation is that gloves destroy the indispensable sense of touch. To a burglar, for instance, who is carefully feeling his way in the dark in a house which is unfamiliar



and to whom the outstretched fingers are so many antennæ, gloves are impossible.

Thus, in most of the weird and dramatic cases which follow, I shall describe how the attempts against property and life were swiftly followed by the arrest of the wrongdoer and his punishment. In giving in detail some of the true mechanism of criminal investigation, I hope to show how small are the chances in favour of impunity.

H. ASHTON-WOLFE

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# WARPED IN THE MAKING

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## EPISODE I

THE MURDER OF DON RAMON VALDEZ Y CAZAL





# WARPED IN THE MAKING



## EPISODE I

### THE MURDER OF DON RAMON VALDEZ Y CAZAL

#### CHAPTER I

##### THE DISCOVERY OF THE MURDER

LIKE the dark caverns among the rocks of the ocean bed, seen vaguely through the glass of a deep-sea diver's helmet, hidden and obscured by waving tentacles of weeds, with loathsome, terrible monsters moving sluggishly in their gloomy depths, so are the strange dark thoughts stirring constantly in the subconscious human mind — urging, warping, shaping the destiny of every man.

Who can guess at the uncouth desires, hidden motives, and secret longings crawling in the cells of the brain? Who can trace the ever-widening circles of heredity, as these cells are transmitted through generations? Thus the study of crime is the study of mankind in its truest form.

And so I believe that the battle of obscure passions and abnormal instincts which culminated in the murder of that elegant young nobleman, Don Ramon Valdez y Cazal, merely proves once more that every human being is an absolute mystery to his fellows; covered with a veneer of convention,

but capable of the strangest and most terrible things, if once the self-restraint and hypocrisy imposed upon us by civilisation are torn away.

According to whether our blood runs more or less redly in our veins, we are all to a certain extent potential killers and criminals. Only fear of the consequences has taught us to chain up the red-eyed beast inside.

For some time now Dr. Bertillon, the great criminologist and head of the Paris Anthropometrical Department, had left me almost entirely in charge of the photographic section. The work was arduous and absorbing. Nor did I take the responsibility lightly; for I knew only too well that often the life and liberty of a man or the detection and punishment of a criminal depended entirely upon my microscopes and cameras; and upon the correct and rapid classifying of marks, stains, or imprints of fingers.

Nevertheless I longed for a crime wherein the foreign element or some out-of-the-way factor would call for my chief's and my own active participation and break the monotony of daily routine.

I loved to watch Dr. Bertillon at work. His rapid deductions, his subtle reasoning, and his profound knowledge of human nature — more particularly warped and criminal human nature — made it a thrilling, fascinating study to be allowed to assist him.

He would have been the greatest detective in the world had he chosen to be on the active staff of the

Sûreté; yet, after all, I am not sure: he disliked intensely the ugly side of the actual hunting of man. It was the mathematical and scientific problem only which attracted him.

To his precise but abstract brain the perpetrator of a crime was only the unknown quantity, to be discovered by logic and analysis: but now and then, when a more than ordinary crime did force him to leave his laboratory for a while and come to the assistance of the puzzled police, I saw that the instinct of the hunter was there, although masked by a feigned indifference.

One morning I was startled to learn that the well-known Spanish aristocrat Don Ramon, whose horse Sancho Panza had but lately carried off the Grand Prix, had been discovered dead — murdered apparently — in his library.

The house of the dead man was in the fashionable Rue la Boétie; and Monsieur Colbert, one of the most efficient of the Sûreté officers in charge of the Elysée Division of the Paris Criminal Investigation, was busy upon the case.

It was believed that someone, probably a woman, had gained access to the apartment of Don Ramon and had poisoned a decanter of wine which was standing on the table across which the Spaniard had fallen.

During the day I received two of the special carriers designed by Dr. Bertillon for the transport of objects to be tested for finger-prints. In one was the decanter, a beautiful piece of Bohemian crystal; in



the other was the wineglass from which Don Ramon had drunk. I also received two waxed cards, with impressions of the dead man's hands.

For several hours I was kept tantalisingly busy with the various phases of laboratory work which such a case involves, but it was like hearing someone speak on the telephone, where one half of the conversation is inaudible; I received work to do, but knew little of the trend of the investigation. Great was my joy, therefore, when I received instructions to go at once to the house of the murdered man and place myself entirely at the disposal of the investigating officer.

I knew André Colbert well. He had been a pupil of Dr. Bertillon for several years and had then gone to Lyons and worked some time under Monsieur Fénelon, the chief of the Sûreté there. I knew that he would be tremendously excited by the great opportunity which had come his way. Young, ambitious, and imbued with all the most modern theories, he knew that the older men looked with disfavour upon his rapid promotion. Now was the chance to prove his qualities.

André Colbert always gave me the impression of a fox. His pointed face, brown eyes, and tawny hair all combined to create this unmistakable resemblance. Quick, alert, and nervous, he would pace or rather glide up and down a room when talking, like a caged animal. And he constantly, unceasingly smoked a short pipe — which he was always lighting and which as often went out. The more excited André became, the more freely would he gesticulate

with this pipe, with the result — since a Frenchman always gesticulates when he talks — that, after a lengthy conversation, the floor and tables would be strewn with burnt matches.

When I arrived at the apartment where the Spaniard had lived, I found my colleague sitting near a window, examining some letters. At my entrance he jumped up and came towards me with outstretched hand.

‘Splendid! I am glad you are here. This is a wonderful case, but a very difficult one also. You have brought your implements?’

I pointed to my assistant, who was already busy unpacking cameras and microscopes.

‘Très bien. Well, then, perhaps I had better tell you briefly what I have discovered. We are both pupils of the same great master and I need not pose before you. I am perplexed — but yes — very much perplexed. Figure to yourself — I receive a telephone message from the valet Désiré. Bien — I come and I find the dead man — there in that chair. Will you note it all down? It helps to crystallise one’s thoughts to go over the details aloud. He was sitting with his head lying sideways on an open book, one arm stretched across the table. He had placed the tips of his fingers on the table to support himself and had half-risen — the marks are there — and then collapsed. It killed quickly, this poison. The other arm was hanging down, fingers outstretched, and under them on the carpet where it had dropped was a wineglass. Some of the contents have stained the carpet. His face was horrible — swollen and

purple. The doctor says the poison must instantly produce asphyxia. But he does not know it. I have sent some of the wine in the decanter to our little Lebrun. He will know what it is — hein? Bien — I then measured the contents. The decanter was nearly full. Only one wineglass had been filled from it. I reason that Don Ramon was alone, for he was reading, and only one glass in the room. Had anyone been with him there would have been two or more glasses and he would not have been reading.'

'What was the book?' I asked.

'Parfait, mon vieux! I was waiting for you to ask that. But it does not help. A medical treatise — mental diseases; nothing in that.'

'Isn't it rather a strange book for a man like the Spaniard to read? Perhaps he was becoming insane or feared something of the kind and committed suicide.'

André turned on me like an angry dog.

'Nonsense, nonsense! Wait till you have all the facts. Besides, a man like that does not commit suicide. Young, rich, and good-looking: and he was lucky with his horses, one of them was entered for the Longchamps races to-morrow. Furthermore, he was to have married the beautiful American Rachel Holbein, who sings at the Opéra-Comique.'

'Well — *cherchez la femme*; perhaps they had quarrelled and he killed himself because of her.'

'No — although it is true that they had quarrelled. But when you say seek the woman, you are on the right road. Now — I continue — his big bookcase had been broken open. Strange to say the

key was in his pocket. Whoever did it was in a rage, for the beautiful wood has been cut and hacked quite unnecessarily. A knife from the kitchen was used. The person who did it knew where the kitchen was and where the knives were kept. You have received that knife?’

I nodded.

‘Good; then come and look. That big painting of Don Ramon has been slashed and cut to pieces.’

I walked over to where my friend pointed and saw shreds and tatters of canvas hanging from a frame.

‘This stiletto — a beautiful little silver toy — did that. Look, it is still on the carpet — we have not touched it.’

‘But why not the kitchen knife?’ I queried.

‘Obviously the painting was slashed first, then, since the stiletto was too slender to break open the bookcase, the knife was fetched.’

‘Why was the bookcase broken open?’ I asked.

‘Ah, I do not know — the shelves are packed full — nothing seems to be missing. But there must be marks — finger-marks — both on the knife and the bookcase.’

I gave the necessary instructions to my assistant who at once set to work. When all the polished parts of the door and the glass had been carefully sprayed with a certain colouring matter, we saw that there were indeed marks. Colbert sighed with satisfaction. Then, while these were being photographed, he continued his exposé:

‘The slashing of the portrait at once made me



think of a woman; for who else would do such a petty thing? On the table I found this' — and he showed me a glove which he had carefully placed in a tin box — 'and a dainty lace handkerchief, perfumed — but no monogram. The perfume Lebrun has identified as "Le Chevalier d'Orsay." Some papers — letters or documents — have been burned in the anthracite stove within the last few days.

'I then questioned the servants. Strange to say, none of them sleep in the apartment. They have a number of rooms in a different part of the house. They tell me they had strict orders never to disturb their master after eight o'clock. But there are bells by which they can be summoned. Only the valet saw his master come in between seven and eight. He met him at the door of the lift and Don Ramon told him not to serve dinner because he did not feel well, but about ten he would take a little cold supper. It was when this was taken in that his death was discovered. The decanter of wine and a glass had been placed in readiness for his master's return by the valet, shortly after lunch. Désiré had then gone out — it was his free afternoon. The wine was Amontillado, a species of sherry, which his master always drank. The concierge says that the fiancée, Miss Holbein, called three times during the afternoon, whilst the Spaniard was out. The first time the concierge did not notice her come in, and saw with surprise how pale and agitated she was when she went out. The second time Miss Holbein only entered the main hall; but the third time she again took the lift and came down about ten minutes later.

A maid from a flat on the opposite side of the street swears that she saw a woman's shadow pass several times across the blind of the window of this room — it was then dark and the light had been switched on. Now I have also found the taxi-driver who drove Miss Holbein to the door of this house early in the afternoon. He says it was about four o'clock. Last of all, there are these letters, which define the case in my opinion.

'She was angry with her fiancé because of an entanglement with another woman. She threatened several times to break off the engagement, and in these last two letters she swears that she will kill Don Ramon if she finds that he has been untrue to her. I am only waiting to know the result of your work and what the poison is, before applying for a warrant against her.'

I felt intensely disappointed. If what my colleague said was true, then the case would prove to be very tame from my point of view; although the names of the people involved would supply the newspapers with scare headlines for many days.

It was almost unbelievable that this beautiful woman, whom I had heard only the week before in the rôle of Carmen, and whose magnificent contralto voice had charmed all Paris, could have committed a cowardly murder.

It is so hard to remember that these dazzling favourites of the fickle public are just human beings — nothing more.

Whilst I was finishing my work and carefully packing the little silver stiletto, I saw that an officer

from headquarters had arrived, whom I knew. His name was Rousseau, but we always called him 'the Brigadier' because of his resemblance to the gendarme as he is caricatured.

Rousseau was one of the old guard. He would have looked well in the uniform of one of Napoleon's veterans. A red face, with a more deeply tinted nose, due, I am sorry to say, to a taste in old wines and Calvados brandy, a great bristling moustache that covered a good-natured, humorous mouth, and a twinkling pair of light blue eyes, were the most noticeable features. Rousseau looked what he was, a true child of the Paris slums. He had worked his way up to his present position by a kind of dogged perseverance and more than a leavening of good luck. Somehow, although he disdained all modern science and openly laughed at photographs and finger-prints, he nearly always found his man. Bertillon said to me once: 'Rousseau knows every thief and apache in Paris. He drinks with all of them, and so succeeds where we should fail. People will talk to Rousseau and tell him things. When we come along, they are dumb.'

I could see that Colbert was very annoyed.

'He has been here all day, that old fool, and up to his usual tricks. Drinking with the servants and coachmen, nosing around in the dustbins, and interviewing the riff-raff. Hurry up, mon cher ami, and let me have a report at once. I'll show the Brigadier what modern science can do. I'll be waiting to hear from you in my office at six.'

I agreed to this and then crossed over and shook

hands with Rousseau, who winked pleasantly when he saw all my instruments.

At six o'clock I sent a special messenger to Colbert's office with the result of my work. I knew that he would be very disappointed; for the enlargements showed that every imprint — on the knife, on the stiletto, and on the bookcase — had been made by the dead man. This confirmed my idea that it was a case of suicide and that the man had suddenly become insane. The key of the bookcase was in his pocket, and yet for no apparent reason he had broken it open without concern for the damage to his beautiful furniture. He also must have cut his own portrait to ribands — the marks on the knife proved that clearly.

I was more than surprised, therefore, when a little later Colbert called me to the telephone and informed me that he had arrested Miss Holbein.

'She is guilty — without a doubt,' he said. 'We caught her just as she was leaving for Cherbourg. She had a ticket to Southampton in her bag and a cabin reserved on the Prince Wilhelm, a North-German Lloyd boat leaving Southampton to-morrow for New York. In her rooms, hidden in the drawer of a bureau, was a little packet containing a grey powder, which Lebrun says is some of the poison used to kill Don Ramon. Furthermore, she always used the perfume "Le Chevalier d'Orsay." Congratulate me!'

I did so — but I was glad that he could not see my face. Somehow — I don't know why — I felt dissatisfied. Circumstantial evidence is no evidence.



Yet in France, where the arrested person is considered guilty until he proves his innocence, circumstantial evidence has ruined many lives.

Although familiarity blunts the feelings, I still thrill with pride when I hear a judge at the Old Bailey say to the jury, in his summing up: 'If the prosecution has failed to prove to your entire satisfaction and without the shadow of a doubt, that the prisoner is guilty — then that prisoner must be acquitted.'

All the difference is there. Not that I wish to suggest for a moment that French judges are unfair — no, they are fair and humane; it is the system that is bad.

The next morning every paper printed a front-page article commenting on the arrest of Miss Rachel Holbein and praising the rapid, masterly investigation carried out by my friend André Colbert.

The Spaniard Don Ramon, who was soon to have married the singer, had been seen constantly with her for the last six months, at Deauville, at Ostend, and at the Longchamps races. Everywhere his famous thoroughbreds had gained victories and Miss Holbein had been by his side to applaud them, as he had applauded every one of her triumphs at the Opéra-Comique. A love match, so all Paris thought. But apparently there had been another woman. The papers hinted at an unsavoury entanglement, of which the American had learned.

I was reading the various more or less imaginary details in the 'Matin' when the door opened and Rousseau came in with a sheepish grin. After some

commonplace remark he laid a parcel on my desk with an air of great mystery; this, looking cautiously around him the while, he unwrapped. In it was a thin steel blade, something like a palette knife, but without a handle. It had been carefully placed between two small pieces of wood at each end and two sheets of cardboard, so that the wrapping-paper could not touch it.

I smiled when I saw these precautions.

‘I thought you did not believe in our methods, Brigadier?’ I could not help saying.

‘I don’t as a rule,’ he replied soberly, ‘but here it is a case for speed. That young upstart Colbert has arrested an innocent woman. Every day she spends in the cells is a day she will never forget. And she is an American, a countrywoman of those for whom Lafayette of glorious memory fought. Therefore I have come to you to gain time. Besides, monsieur, you are a man who does not rely on mechanical helps alone, you use common-sense. I want to collect evidence in her favour to place before Monsieur de Kersac the next time he questions the poor little demoiselle of the Opéra.’

‘You do not believe then that Mademoiselle Holbein had anything to do with the murder?’

‘*Jamais de la vie!* This blade was lying on the floor just inside the door leading to the apartment from the servant’s staircase at the back. It has been used to prise open a small window which shuts only with a bolt. The marks on the edge and on the bolt prove that. There are also several scratches on the door, and a bent wire has been tried on the lock.

Then, just inside the room where the dead man was found, I discovered a muddy footprint. I have measured and made a drawing of it. I have also covered it with a piece of glass and given strict orders that this is not to be touched. Thirdly, a little thing which Monsieur Colbert also overlooked, is that a secret drawer in an *escritoire* has been opened. There is a small square patch inside where there is no dust, although it is thick everywhere else on the bottom of the drawer. Evidently it had remained undisturbed for a long time. The dust had also collected on the thing, whatever it was, that was taken out, for some has fallen on the edge of the drawer. Here is some of the dust in this piece of paper. Please go at once and see with your microscope if there is any trace of the same dust on the packet of poison found in Miss Holbein's room. Dust is dust, I know, but in this case wood-worms have been at work and some of the powdered wood has fallen into the drawer.'

'I think, Brigadier,' I said, rising and saluting him, 'that when you pretend to despise our methods it is just a pose — even Dr. Bertillon could have done no finer work.'

The old fellow flushed with pleasure.

'Well, monsieur, I love music and often this poor little girl, now in prison, has charmed me with her beautiful voice; so I want to obtain her release quickly. This blade here was never used by her dainty hands. That is the work of a man, not a woman. Now please see if you can find any signs on the surface.'

‘Had I not better come with you and examine that door and window; there may be something there too.’

‘Not necessary, monsieur — the man who used this blade is an amateur; his fingers are certainly not in our records. Only a novice would use such a clumsy tool. Besides, I know already what he looks like. He was seen — has been seen many times. Au revoir — I will come back later. Please remember this is a private call. Don’t tell Colbert about it.’

‘Wait a moment, Brigadier,’ I said. ‘When I complimented you just now, it was for the technical perfection of your investigation. The finding of this blade and of the footprint seems to indicate that a man — the man who you say watched and followed Don Ramon — entered the apartment. But the secret drawer from which something — which we will suppose was the packet of poison — was taken, only draws the net more tightly around Miss Holbein.’

‘Why so, monsieur?’

‘Think a moment, Brigadier. Is it likely that a man, a stranger, since he followed Don Ramon in the daytime, would have any knowledge of the secret drawer and its contents? Whereas Miss Holbein — affianced to Don Ramon — may have known of it. Don Ramon probably told her about it.’

‘But you misunderstand me, monsieur,’ the Brigadier said, coming close to me. ‘I am not stubborn. If the paper with the poison, found in Miss Holbein’s rooms, came from the secret drawer, then

I shall begin to believe that she is guilty. I am hoping, however, that your tests will prove that *it did not*. In that case, perhaps a document or some very important thing was taken from the drawer, and it was because of it that Don Ramon was murdered. Au revoir, monsieur, and, once more, not a word to Monsieur Colbert.'

I nodded, and the Brigadier withdrew.

I at once telephoned to Monsieur Colbert and requested him to send me the packet of poison found by him. Unfortunately it had already been sent to the investigating judge Monsieur de Kersac. To him I dispatched a messenger with a note insisting on the care with which the package must be handled.

I was about to commence my tests on the blade when the telephone bell rang.

Going to the instrument, I heard to my surprise the well-known, cheery voice of my old friend Bannister.

'I'm coming to see you — now — at once,' he said. 'We are on this Don Ramon business together. I have a letter from Monsieur Dufresne asking your chief to let you work with me. In "a little half-hour" I'll be there.'

This was good news, indeed. It was a delightful thing to work together with Bannister, whose good nature and absolute fearlessness made him the ideal companion in any adventure.

I wondered what marvellous disguises he would invent during this case. For that he could investigate a murder without using the most elaborate



make-up was, I knew, a sheer impossibility. Those who have read the series of crimes described in 'The Underworld' will remember that it was Bannister who taught me the art of disguise, although I always was and always shall be sceptical of such carnival masquerade. I felt sure that the arrest of Miss Holbein had unleashed the American man-hunter. That this meant my coöperation was inevitable; for many were the services he and his unique organisation had rendered the French Sûreté; therefore all their resources were at Bannister's disposal. Ever since we together had captured the spiked monster Lacombe, Bannister insisted on my help, for we were not only firm friends, but akin in tastes and thoughts.

It was truly but 'a little half-hour' later — as the French say — when the door opened and the tall, athletic form of the American appeared.

With just a word of greeting he sank down into a chair I pushed forward. From his pocket he pulled a letter and a telegram.

'Here is the letter from Dufresne for Dr. Bertillon. This cable is from my people in New York,' he said. 'I am to investigate this murder on behalf of the family of Miss Holbein, and to spare no expense. It is absurd that she should be arrested on so little evidence. I must see Monsieur de Kersac at once and obtain her release. The American Ambassador will also intervene if necessary. Now tell me all you know. We will compare notes and then see the investigating judge.'

Briefly I told Bannister what I knew. When he heard that Rousseau was on a different trail, he

grinned with satisfaction. Bannister knew the Brigadier.

'We must work with the old veteran; he will help us, if only to beat Colbert,' he said. 'Well, I will wait while you examine the blade, but, to save time, send the letter to your chief so that we can start immediately afterwards.'

'I think the telephone will save us much delay,' I suggested. Bannister agreed.

First I explained the state of affairs to Dr. Bertillon, who I knew was at his residence that day. He told me that Monsieur Dufresne had already telephoned and that I could place myself entirely at the American's disposal, but that I must arrange matters with Monsieur Colbert and carry out the work which he would require me to attend to personally.

I then telephoned to the office of the judge, Monsieur de Kersac.

He agreed to see us in an hour, since he was interrogating Miss Holbein again that day. Before leaving, I handed the blade to one of my colleagues, asking him to let me have the results enlarged as soon as possible. This done we drove to the Quai des Orfèvres. We should not be allowed to see the prisoner without a special permit from Monsieur de Kersac, so that it was best to see him first. I told Bannister that this 'Juge d'Instruction,' as the investigating judge is called, was a clever, subtle, but fair-minded man, with no desire to pose in the press and that therefore it could only be the finding of the poison which had made him consent to Miss Hol-

bein's arrest. Monsieur de Kersac received us very kindly. In a few words he explained that the poison used to kill the Don was unknown in France, and, since some of it had been found in the flat of Miss Rachel Holbein, he could not possibly consent to a private interview; but, if we would wait, Maître Marcel Giraud, the famous barrister, who was acting for the prisoner, would be there shortly, and we could be present at the examination of Miss Holbein and question her afterwards in his and the lawyer's presence.

'I cannot let you have the paper with the poison yet,' he said, turning to me; 'but it shall be at your disposal later.'

I explained that I wished to examine the exterior only and I should be glad, therefore, if it could be placed in a small box. I handed him one which I had brought for that purpose. Into this he placed a little folded blue paper which was on the table in front of him. I bowed my thanks.

As soon as Maître Giraud arrived, Miss Holbein was conducted by two Sûreté officers to the judge's chambers, where I had my first view of her at close quarters.

She was a beautiful brunette, tall and dignified, with a complexion almost Latin in its depth of tone, although to-day she appeared woefully pale and wan.

She listened calmly whilst the judge told her who we were, but her quick glance at her countryman showed that his presence was a comfort to her. For a few moments she conferred in an undertone with

her counsel. Then Monsieur de Kersac requested her to sit down, as he had some questions to put to her.

Instinctively I felt my nerves tense, for I knew of old the terrible rapier-play of the quick question and answer, upon which so often hang the life and liberty of an accused person. Every word is taken down by the greffier — the clerk — and used in evidence against the prisoner, but he is not warned of this as in England. Only lately has it been permitted that a lawyer may be present.

To-day, however, there was little fencing. To all the questions Miss Holbein replied wearily, 'I am innocent. I do not know anything about the matter. I did not kill my fiancé.'

Abruptly Monsieur de Kersac said:

'Where did you get the powder from, with which you poisoned the wine and which we found in your writing-desk?' And with these words he placed the box with the small blue paper on his table in front of her.

It was apparent to all that the prisoner's surprise was genuine.

'That is not mine,' she said. 'I never had any poison in my desk. I know nothing about it.'

The judge was visibly disappointed. He had reckoned on the sudden shock. So far the prosecution had not scored. Now, however, Monsieur de Kersac began to insist upon knowing how Miss Holbein had spent the day on which the murder was committed. The prisoner became confused and troubled.

She could not say — she could not remember, and finally she refused to answer. At last the judge ceased his interrogation, but the impression created was a bad one. Evidently Miss Holbein was hiding something.

As soon as the greffier had left, Bannister sat down beside his countrywoman and, placing his hand upon hers, he asked her to tell him all she knew or could say to aid him, since he was engaged by her people in America to prove her innocence.

‘Have you any idea who killed Don Ramon?’ he asked.

At this question Miss Holbein shuddered and closed her eyes as if to shut out some terrible vision.

‘I don’t know,’ she faltered. ‘I never knew he had an enemy — I loved him — but there were things in his life of which I dare not think — of which I knew nothing — until ——’ Her voice trailed off.

‘Until ——?’ Bannister pressed her.

‘Oh, don’t ask me any more — it’s horrible — for I loved him so! I will never tell — never! I can only repeat I did not kill him.’ And she broke out sobbing, covering her face with her hands.

‘But will you not tell us how this poison came to be in your possession?’ Bannister asked gently, when she had recovered somewhat.

‘I really, truly do not know.’

‘Well, can you remember if any stranger has been alone in your rooms since the murder — think — it is vital that you should remember.’ Bannister’s voice was insistent, his gaze hypnotic.



‘No one,’ she replied. ‘Unless my maid admitted someone.’

After some more questions, Miss Holbein was led away again.

We had a few moments’ conversation with her counsel, who seemed deeply moved by his client’s distress. He told us that he had been able to do nothing for her as yet, since she would not confide in him and merely repeated that she knew nothing concerning her fiancé’s death.

To our request for the temporary release of Miss Holbein, the judge shrugged his shoulders and pointed out that, in view of the evidence and the attitude of the prisoner, he could not allow it, but that she should receive every kindness and attention which it was in his power to grant her. With this we had to be content.

Once outside, Bannister seized my arm. ‘Now, mon vieux — to work! We must question the maid and find out if anyone entered the prisoner’s flat between the day of the murder and her arrest, and also try to find out what Miss Holbein did and where she went on the day Don Ramon was killed. The solution of the mystery is there. Then we will talk with our friend the Brigadier. But first the maid; before the judge gets hold of her. I saw him make a note of that remark! He understands English.’

We drove at once to the Rue Voltaire, where Miss Holbein resided.

A surprise awaited us there. As we passed the concierge, a well-known face peered out at us from

the doorway; it was the Brigadier. His nose was redder than ever and his moustache bristled fiercely, but his twinkling eyes looked quizzically at our astonished faces.

'Ah, ah, mes enfants — so we are on the same road, eh? — and it is a broad avenue — if only that fool Colbert knew it. I will wager a bottle of wine that I know why you have come. *La femme de chambre*, eh? Is it not? Eh bien, come to the *Café des Artistes* with me and I will tell you what I have discovered, for Monsieur Bannister is not a rival, and his presence tells me that he wishes to help the little one, so sad and unhappy in the cells.'

Together we went with Rousseau to the *café*.

After sipping his wine thoughtfully for a moment, he said, 'First — what does the "juge" think and what did Miss Rachel Holbein say?'

'How did you know we had seen her?' asked Bannister.

'Eh, Monsieur the American — we in France think, too, sometimes — even the old Brigadier; but is it not obvious that you would not have come here at once, unless you had seen the poor girl? You have seen her — voilà — you know she did not kill her fiancé and so you come here instead of going to Monsieur Colbert.'

Bannister nodded. Then he repeated what had taken place.

The Brigadier listened attentively.

'It is fortunate that I came to question Céline, the maid, this morning, for she has just been sent for by Monsieur de Kersac. But she will not talk much.

I have told her how dangerous that would be for her mistress. Now we are going to work together, we three, hein? Then listen whilst Papa Rousseau talks; but first another bottle. I have had to drink "Pinard"" (a cheap claret) 'all day, with coachmen and concierges and the taste is bad.'

I ordered another bottle and settled down to listen.

'To begin, then,' Rousseau went on, 'when I arrived from headquarters I at once looked at the room where the Spaniard was killed. There was a lady's glove there, only one, and it was that and the lace handkerchief which started friend Colbert thinking of a woman. But I reasoned differently. The valet stated that he met Don Ramon at the door of the lift and that his master was alone, nor was there a woman waiting for him, for otherwise we should have found less wine in the decanter. Even if she afterwards threw away her glass, she would have had to pretend to drink with him at least. Also it is not likely that he would have sat at his table reading a medical book. Therefore no woman was there when he drank. It is just possible that a woman entered and left before he came; in that event she must have had a key or broken in. The valet told me that he had opened the door to no one. Besides, everything points *too obviously* to a woman's presence; that has been done to mislead us. I looked everywhere and I finally found that peculiar blade and the marks on the back door. I am convinced that it was not Miss Holbein who did that. So I saw the concierge and the coachman.

Also the servants next door and opposite, and discovered that a man — very tall, dark, broad-shouldered, with a beard and moustache like an artist, a “rapin” — has been every day in the neighbourhood, always watching the windows of Don Ramon’s flat. Several times he was seen to follow the Spaniard, and on the day of the murder he called and asked the concierge if Don Ramon was at home. He went away when she told him that he was out, but she believes she saw him pass some hours later. He came by very quickly, and as it was dark she is not quite sure. Now the little maid Céline, who has been with the American for a long time, says that a man exactly like this bearded one called the day after the murder was discovered and asked to see her mistress. He said that he wished to apply for a place as coachman. He waited in the salon while she went to inform her mistress, who was ill in bed. Miss Holbein sent her back to say that there was no vacancy. When she returned, the man was in the corridor and looked as if he had intended to go without waiting. The writing-desk in the salon was probably not locked and it was no difficult thing for anyone to slip the poison into a drawer. Now one last point — here is a glove belonging to the American girl, and it is two sizes smaller than the glove which was found. Voilà —’

For a moment Bannister and I sat still, saying nothing. Who was this unknown man who had entered the Don’s flat? Had he poisoned the wine or had he come too late and found him dead; and, guessing who killed him, had attempted to throw

the blame on the American girl? I put this question to the Brigadier.

‘But why another — a third person?’ he asked.

‘Because the maid in the house opposite saw a woman’s shadow pass across the window of Don Ramon’s library several times on the evening he died. That is one of the first things Colbert found out.’

‘Yes, that is true — but shadows seen from such a distance are deceptive. She must have good eyesight that maid. Why was she so interested in the Don’s windows. One never knows — we will see her.’

‘Besides,’ I continued, ‘there *was* another woman, we know that, for that is why Miss Holbein wrote those letters. She knew of her.’

The Brigadier looked thoughtful.

‘I daresay there were many women. A man like that. But you are right. We must also keep our eyes open for a woman when we look for the man. Who knows, one may lead us to the other. Now what do we do? Will you work with me or shall we search independently and compare notes?’

‘I should like to search independently,’ said Bannister, ‘but we must know where to find each other at any time, and we must meet every day to exchange results.’

‘That will be better,’ I agreed, ‘for otherwise we should influence each other too much. We shall each have our point of view and three heads are better than one.’

‘Bien,’ said Rousseau. ‘Now will you see if that blue paper came from the secret drawer? Unfortu-



nately, it will not prove anything in favour of Miss Holbein if it did, for I quite realise how improbable it is that this man knew of the existence of the drawer and its contents, unless we find after all that he knew the Spaniard intimately.'

'Yes,' I agreed, 'if he did, but it was more probably taken by the unknown woman, who may have been very intimate with the dead man.'

'Well, here is the size of the dust-free space in the drawer,' said the Brigadier, rising and handing me a piece of paper.

'Au revoir. Every day we meet here at six, and twice a day we will communicate with the office of Monsieur Bannister, hein?' So it was agreed.

We also left and returned to my laboratory. Monsieur de Kersac had kept his word. On my table was the little box containing the blue paper. In size it corresponded exactly to the measurements Rousseau had given me and under the microscope I found three small grains of mahogany, such as worms leave behind in old furniture.

I had almost expected this, but a surprise was in store for us. On one corner of the paper, chemical tests brought out the lines and ridges of a thumb-mark and it had been made quite recently by Don Ramon himself.

## CHAPTER II

### THE RUSSIAN SERGE ORDINOFF

OUR plan of campaign was quickly formed. Somewhere in the past life and among the unknown and more shady friends of the dead man we had to search for the other woman. Both Bannister and I believed that the bearded man and this woman were accomplices. So, leaving the astute Brigadier to hunt for the man, we set to work to trace her. First we went to the house in the Rue la Boétie and had a long chat with the janitor's wife — the concierge — who in France makes it her business to know all that is to be known about the tenants, since she is virtually in charge of the house. From her we learned several things that were worth noting. Don Ramon had been in the habit of disappearing mysteriously for days and sometimes weeks at a time. She never found out where he went, but imagined that a vulgar love affair was at the bottom of it. Often upon reappearing he was pale and listless and sometimes he even returned bruised and scratched. Once he came back suddenly one evening with his arm in a sling. When we pressed her to know if the woman mentioned in the letters written by Miss Holbein had ever been there, the concierge raised her hand in an eloquent gesture — 'Woman!' she exclaimed. 'Mais, mon bon monsieur, I could never remember all the ladies who came to see Don Ramon. He was both rich and handsome — alors?' She also told us

that the Spaniard had often given dinner parties; but never at home — always at one of the big restaurants. She could not recall having seen the tall bearded man before, but she well remembered that he had asked for Don Ramon on the day of his death. This was what the Brigadier had told us. I had telephoned in the meantime to my assistant and learned that two very clear thumb-marks had been obtained from the blade and sent to headquarters, where the records were being searched.

Since the concierge could tell us nothing else, we went upstairs to the sumptuous apartment of Don Ramon, where we found an officer on guard. I showed him our special permit and we entered. Colbert had searched very thoroughly, but still, since we were on a different trail, we hoped to find something which he had overlooked. For some time our efforts were in vain. Then, just as we were going, I happened to pick up a small leather-bound volume lying on a table in the bedroom, in which were many pages covered with a neat, firm handwriting in Spanish. Turning these pages eagerly I saw that it was a species of diary, with here and there some verses. This I carried away to translate later. We found no letters of importance, but among various accounts we discovered a bill from a doctor — for treatment for a wound. I remembered that the concierge when questioned had said that, after one of the Don's mysterious absences, he had returned with his arm in a sling. So he had been wounded — how and by whom? His valet could or would tell us nothing — his master had probably hurt himself,

but he did not know how. The doctor, too, whom we visited at once, could tell us very little except that he had treated Don Ramon for a deep cut in the right shoulder, inflicted by a knife. It had healed well. The chief point was that the wound had already been bandaged when the doctor called and that the first treatment had certainly been obtained at a hospital. Which hospital he did not know. The date of the doctor's first visit was of course entered in his book and the wound was then about twenty-four hours old. For the rest of the day we interviewed the various hospitals. Nowhere was there any record of a man answering to the Spaniard's appearance having received treatment for a knife wound. But in a small hospital in the Latin Quarter the surgeon found that on the evening corresponding to the date we gave a man and a woman had come in. The woman was bleeding from a knife thrust in the right shoulder. The doctor remembered them well, because he wished to inform the police, but the woman had explained that it had been an accident. The man was evidently not a Frenchman. A Russian, he thought. A giant; tall, broad-shouldered, and bearded, looking like an art student, with a velvet jacket and the 'beret' of the painters. The woman, a lady, had a fine deep contralto voice, spoke French with a slight accent, and was very handsome and dark, with short-cut, curly hair. She said her name was Madame Delavigne. The address she gave was Rue des Moulins. They did not come again.

'Well,' said Bannister when we left, 'this is a

mixed result. The man is the same. There is no doubt; and the woman is probably the one we are looking for, but did this Russian stab both the Spaniard and the woman, and in the same spot?’

‘It is a strange coincidence certainly,’ I replied; ‘I would not have missed this case for anything. But doesn’t it strike you that the description might apply equally well to Miss Holbein as to this “other woman” we are looking for?’

‘You mean because she was dark and because the doctor mentioned the voice?’

‘Yes, we must certainly enquire whether Miss Holbein has ever been wounded in the arm. Now let us go to the address the doctor gave. It might possibly be a true one. At six we must meet the Brigadier, so we have just time.’

The address proved to be truly that of a Madame Martina Delavigne, a foreigner, we were told, and a widow, although still quite young, but she was absent for the moment; she often went away for long periods to see her family in the South of France. Such a nice lady, the concierge told us, but what a pity it was that she did not rid herself of that surly brute Serge Ordinoff. He made her life unbearable with his jealousy. Once he had stabbed her and madame had gone away vowing that she would never see him again. For days he had hung about the house — until she threatened to call a policeman; but she had not seen him lately. The description of this Serge Ordinoff was that of the man Rousseau was searching for. We could see that the garrulous old janitor desired to give us a good impression of



Madame Delavigne, for I had shown her my badge. Unfortunately her description of the lady fitted Miss Holbein in every detail. There had not been many gentlemen who called to see her tenant; she could only remember two who came often; one was that Russian and the other a dark foreigner, about whom she knew nothing. Madame Delavigne had no maid and the concierge looked after the flat. Finally we withdrew, assuring her that her tenant had done nothing wrong, that it was only the Russian whom we wished to find, and that she must be careful not to let him know of our visit. To this she eagerly agreed, for clearly she did not like the fellow.

At the Café des Artistes we found the Brigadier waiting for us. His face had a satisfied look.

‘Eh bien,’ he greeted us. ‘What have you done?’

I smiled. ‘We have found who both the man and the woman are, and we know where she lives.’

‘What!’ he shouted, jumping up. ‘You have done that — but how?’

Enjoying his evident surprise Bannister told him by what means we had picked up the trail. As he proceeded, the Brigadier checked the various details. At the conclusion he thumped the table with his fist.

‘Très bien, fine; that is what I call good work. That doctor’s bill — a little thing, eh?’ — but it proves that we are on the right track. I too found out the man’s name. More — he is a painter well known in the artists’ quarter. He has a studio in the Rue Sausaigne and teaches painting. All those who know him speak of his fierce temper. He was noted for his contemptuous attitude towards women

until some months ago, when he told some of his pupils that he was engaged to be married. No one could tell me who his fiancée was, but he was seen twice with a very handsome girl. He has disappeared from his studio. Now, my friends, we hold the threads; to work, eh? First we go to this studio and we find — many things, perhaps, but not the man; then we go to the apartment of Madame Delavigne and we search and we watch. Wait — one of my men is outside; I will set some traps. The bait will be the woman; and this Russian bear shall walk in.'

'Then you do not think that Madame Delavigne is Miss Holbein, who lived there under another name and led a double life? The description the concierge gave us of her tenant is that of the American prima donna. Even the doctor mentioned the voice. It would explain much. Suppose the Don had found out this dark side of her life and wished to break off the engagement. There was a quarrel and Miss Holbein received a stab — Spaniards easily use a knife. The Russian then came on the scene, and in turn attacked and wounded the Spaniard. Afterwards he accompanied the girl to the hospital. He now knew about the Spaniard, and, madly jealous — if it was he — killed him with poison. On the other hand, if it was Miss Holbein who committed the crime she did so for fear of exposure; for her future — her stage career — everything — was threatened.'

The Brigadier shook his head. 'No,' he said, 'it is ingenious, but I do not think Miss Holbein had any-

thing to do with the killing of Don Ramon. There is another woman. Anyway, we can soon settle that question. Take a portrait of Miss Holbein to the concierge in the Rue des Moulins — she will tell you if it is that of her tenant.'

'Yes,' said Bannister — 'unless she altered her appearance when living there as Madame Delavigne — not a difficult matter for an actress.'

I laughed. 'You would be in your element if disguises were to become a part of this case. You don't seriously believe anyone could keep up such a deception for any length of time?'

'Why not?' Bannister rejoined. 'Remember La Glu — for years he was both apache and British gentleman.'

'Yes' — I had to admit — 'that is quite true, but then he was able to change into a totally different being. Here she would have to remain a lady and to change her appearance without attracting attention. Anyway the wound in the arm will decide the matter. Monsieur de Kersac must give orders to have his prisoner examined by a doctor.'

Rousseau had listened impatiently to our discussion. Now he rose and, going to the door, spoke rapidly with a man posted there, then we left together and calling a car drove to the Rue Sausaigne. It was a large, very old and very ramshackle house, where the Russian had his studio, which was on the top floor. Both Bannister and Rousseau were experts at picking locks, as I knew of old, but I knew also that it was quite against the rules to enter a dwelling without the presence of the local commis-

saire. Rousseau became very angry when I mentioned this.

‘What! and have all the neighbours and the papers tell this Serge that we have been here. Non, non, Papa Rousseau will take the responsibility of this visit on his shoulders. If there is a row at headquarters, I am the one who will get it — en avant!’

I was amused to see that Bannister carried a beautiful pocket case of locksmith’s instruments and the like.

‘There, you see,’ said Rousseau in a whisper, when the door opened and we were inside — ‘our American friend has come prepared — and he has also the revolver, eh?’

‘Sure,’ said Bannister, with a grin, producing a heavy Colt. ‘You never know when it may come in handy.’

Cautiously we went over the flat. There was a large studio with the usual litter of lay figures, easels, and many finished and unfinished paintings. At one end a door led into a bedroom, from which one gained a small library. At the other end was a tiny kitchen. Visibly the man had lived quite alone. When we had bolted the door to guard against a surprise, we began a systematic search. The only thing we found were some letters written in French in a neat feminine hand and signed ‘Martina.’ None were recent. These would help us, for they could be compared with Miss Holbein’s handwriting.

Coming back to the studio, I heard Bannister give a cry. I found him standing before a painting

on an easel, which had been covered by a velvet curtain. It was a half-length portrait of a very beautiful woman. Dark curly hair and deep brown eyes, that gazed proudly at us, were the dominant traits. The features were regular; only about the mouth something was terribly wrong. There was a latent cruelty and a vicious expression hovering on the twisted lips that was utterly repellent. For a long time we stared at it — dazed, astounded. So lost in thought were we that the voice of the Brigadier behind us made us jump.

‘Grand Dieu!’ he exclaimed, ‘but that is a strange face.’

‘Strange!’ said the American; ‘it is devilish. That is the woman who either killed or caused the death of Don Ramon — and he must have been her brother — her twin brother.’

‘Her brother?’ queried the Brigadier.

‘Yes,’ I replied. ‘There is no doubt possible; they were of the same flesh and blood!’ And I held the photograph of the murdered man beside the painting.

The face was the same in every detail, but the mouth of the man was firm and regular, and showed no trace of the fiendish expression to be seen in the painting. Otherwise, but for the hair, they were absolutely alike.

‘That must be Martina,’ I said — ‘Martina Delavigne, the mystery woman, who lives in the Rue des Moulins. The Russian is probably her lover. I begin to think you are right, Brigadier. He it was who killed the Spaniard. Probably he



learned that there was another man — whom she visited or who came to see her. It may have been the Russian who stabbed Martina, of course, but I should rather be inclined to believe that there was a quarrel between the woman and Don Ramon during which he stabbed her. Then it was that the Russian found out about him and determined to kill him believing him to be a rival.'

'But,' Bannister objected, 'the various traces of a woman's visit to the Spaniard's flat. Besides, the concierge in the Rue la Boëtie recognised Miss Holbein.'

'Well,' said the Brigadier thoughtfully, 'Miss Holbein is also dark. To a superficial observer one might easily be mistaken for the other. I feel sure that this Madame Delavigne visited Don Ramon's apartment on the day he was poisoned. The Russian was watching, and unaware of any relationship — if it existed — entered the flat through the back window. Perhaps he intended both the woman and Don Ramon to drink the wine. Who knows?'

Bannister drew a deep breath. 'We are going to learn strange things, I think, when the truth is known,' he said gravely.

How strange none of us then foresaw, although from that moment I believe that my friend and I had a vague foreshadowing of the solution. I read this in his eyes when we looked at each other, but we said nothing to the Frenchman.

From there we drove to the Rue des Moulins. While Rousseau kept the concierge talking about another of her tenants, we slipped upstairs unseen.

Shortly after, the Brigadier joined us on the third floor. One of his men posted opposite had given him the opportunity by calling the talkative old lady into the street. The safety lock gave us much trouble. Finally we had to pass to the back entrance. We were about to try our luck on the servant's door, when the Frenchman pulled us excitedly back.

'Stop!' he said in a tense whisper. 'Someone has already been before us — look!' — and he pointed to the keyhole. All around it the paint was scratched and scored. 'Someone who was very clumsy or who was very excited, so that his hand trembled, has been here. We must go very cautiously to work — perhaps the Russian bear is in there.'

Carefully he turned the handle — the door was not even locked.

The first thing that we saw, on the floor in the bedroom, was a suit of clothes — a man's suit. Bannister stooped down and took note of the tailor's name and the series number inside the lining of a pocket. In another we found a latchkey, a flat Yale key; otherwise the pockets were quite empty. Whilst we examined the clothes, the Brigadier continued to search the room. Abruptly as he opened the door of a large wardrobe, he gave a yell and staggered back, with blood trickling down his face. At the same moment, with a hoarse, inarticulate roar, a gigantic form sprang out and aimed a blow at me with a cudgel — the leg of a chair, we found later. I ducked and tried to seize the fellow's legs, but received a kick in the chest that stretched me out breathless. Dazed and helpless, I saw the

Russian, for there was no doubt who it was, spring at Bannister, whirling his club. But Bannister had not been taken so much by surprise; his pistol cracked and with a howl the fellow dropped his weapon, but ran at the American with his head down. Before Bannister could make up his mind to shoot again — for we wanted the man alive — the huge head struck him in the stomach like a battering-ram. There was a crash, a loud splintering of glass, and the Russian had gone. For a few seconds we were all routed; then, with a snarled 'Nom d'un chien!' the Brigadier rushed after him.

Bannister and I staggered to the wall. 'What a terror that fellow is!' my friend gasped, and I saw that he was deathly sick. The kick I had received, though painful, as all solar-plexus blows are, had not harmed me much, and I stumbled into the kitchen in search of water. A drink of this and a mouthful of brandy from my flask brought us both round. We saw that the Russian had jumped through a large window leading to a flat roof. Here he had smashed a skylight and dropped down into the next house. All secrecy being now useless, we ran down the stairs and out into the street. There we met the Brigadier and two of his men.

'Back!' he yelled at us. 'Back! — my men are driving him up the stairs of the other house. We must get him when he comes out.'

Back we ran, to the terror of the old janitor, and up the stairs. As we reached the third landing, we saw a dark body come tumbling through the broken window,

What a struggle that was! The man was weakened by a wound in the arm where Bannister's shot had taken effect, and we were five to one, yet, before we had him safely handcuffed, every one of us was bleeding and torn in a dozen places. For he not only bit, kicked, and butted; but his teeth were like those of a wild animal, and he used his nails too.

'Did I not say he was a bear, a Russian bear?' the Brigadier gasped, wiping the blood from a swollen and inflamed nose. 'As if my nose was not red enough that this devil must bite it.'

It was true, our prisoner had made those white teeth of his meet through poor Rousseau's nostrils. No wonder he gave that awful yell!

Outside a huge crowd had collected. It opened respectfully when we appeared, looking as if we had fought an army, our gigantic friend firmly held wherever we could get a grip. It was unnecessary, however, for in the cab his mood changed and he sobbed bitterly, his face in his chained hands.

'Oh, Martina, Martina, where are you?' he wailed. 'I shall never see you again now.' And tears trickled from between his fingers.

As soon as the necessary formalities had been gone through and Serge Ordinoff shut safely in a cell, Bannister and I drove to my rooms. We sadly needed a wash and change of linen.

We were both in need of a rest too, but neither could sleep that night without first examining the book I had found in the Spaniard's apartment.

## CHAPTER III

### DR. BERTILLON TAKES A HAND

THE first pages of the little volume had been written several years ago, for every entry was carefully dated. The handwriting was clear and firm denoting a strong, forceful personality. Don Ramon had loved to record every important emotion or episode of his eventful life, for soon we came to a page dealing with his infatuation for a woman whose name was indicated only by initials. That this had been more than a passing episode was apparent by the wealth of detail.

Then, abruptly cutting across the mere outpourings of passion, like a pistol shot on a quiet night, came these strange words: 'All is over. I hate her now. *The other woman has come again. Why will she not leave me in peace?* God help me! I am going away before she finds out.'

Was it possible that this 'other woman' was the original of that portrait who followed him with some terrible plot of revenge? Was she, after all, his sister? We had no other proof of this than a strange resemblance. Then, a little later, we came to several pages written in Spain, while Don Ramon was a lieutenant in the Royal Dragoons. After some details of army life came the description of a duel Don Ramon had fought, ending with 'I must leave the army. But I killed him in a fair fight. Unfortunately, General Martinez does not like duels.



Poor Cordova! He was my best friend. *However that hell-cat was falling in love with him.* For the sake of my manhood I had to kill him. How she will hate me when she comes again!’

Bannister turned the pages feverishly whilst I scanned them for anything which would help us in our investigation. We could not hope to do more. To translate the whole would take too long.

It was apparent that the Don had led a very immoral life. One of the love episodes which had its setting in Paris, and was of more recent date, mentioned the name of a famous music-hall star, notorious for her strange tastes — a modern Sappho in fact. Then again a phrase: ‘*She is slowly destroying me.* Were there ever two beings who hated each other more than we two *who are of the same flesh and blood?*’

At this phrase Bannister laid his hand on my arm.

‘Then she is his sister. He can mean nothing else. Turn over — skip the rest for the moment. Get to the last few weeks before he was killed. There can be no doubt now who it was killed him.’

I turned the leaves until we came to a date only two weeks previous to his death. Here again, after a description of the victory of one of his horses, Don Ramon had written: ‘I was going away with my dear one, but that creature returned! Oh, if only I could kill her *before she kills me!* ‘Rachel — my sweet Rachel — you alone can save me — if you love me well enough to listen to my terrible confession without turning from me with loathing!’ On the next page were the three words, ‘God help

me' — then some twenty leaves had been ruthlessly torn out. And after these nothing but blank pages.

For a long while we sat and stared into vacancy. Then Bannister rose.

'The case is becoming clear. The man Serge knew and loved the other woman: sister or cousin of Don Ramon. In the morning *we shall see if he will speak*. If not, we must hunt until we find her. Anyway, I think this clears Miss Holbein. For some obscure reason this Martina has followed Don Ramon with a lifelong hatred. What was the reason, what was the awful secret of his deadly fear of her? His own flesh and blood, as he says. And how could Miss Holbein save him? We must see her again and show her a copy of those words; then perhaps she will tell us what she knows. I will call in the morning. After a visit to Serge, we will scour Paris for the woman.'

'If she has not left the country,' I said. 'I will ask Dufresne at once to send her description to all ports and frontier stations.'

Bannister nodded. 'Yes, that is routine work, which the Sûreté will do for us. Perhaps it would be well also to put an advertisement in the personal column of the "Journal," the "Matin," and the "Gaulois," "from Serge to Martina." His arrest has been kept out of the papers. Well, good-night.'

With this he went, more thoughtful than I had ever seen him.

I sat for a long while afterwards poring over the strange record we had found. What was the dark secret of this Spaniard's life which had ended in his

murder? I thought of the twisted mouth of the portrait and shuddered.

In the morning a smart young Frenchman carrying a satchel called to see me. For a moment I was taken in by the moustache and imperial; then I burst into a hearty laugh.

‘If you want to fool me, Bannister, you must take off that signet ring which I know too well,’ I said.

My friend grinned, then, twirling his well-waxed moustache, he shrugged his shoulders in true Parisian fashion.

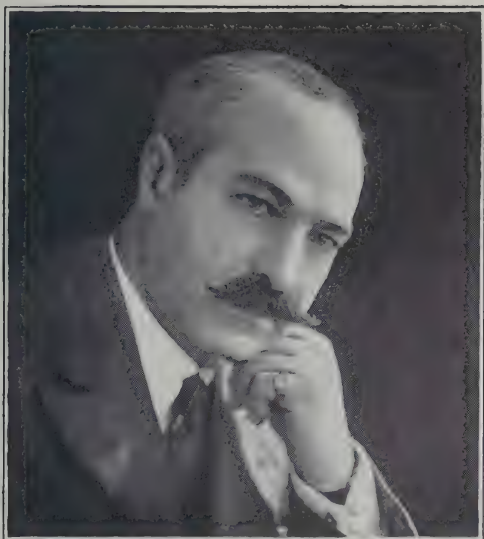
‘Is it necessary that I should also become someone else?’ I asked.

‘But yes,’ Bannister replied. ‘Perhaps you will be my chauffeur. You can get one of the Préfecture taxis, can you not? We have to cover much ground and see many people. Just now I am travelling for a new make of brushes and paints — look’ — and he opened his satchel. I saw that it was well stocked with artists’ materials.

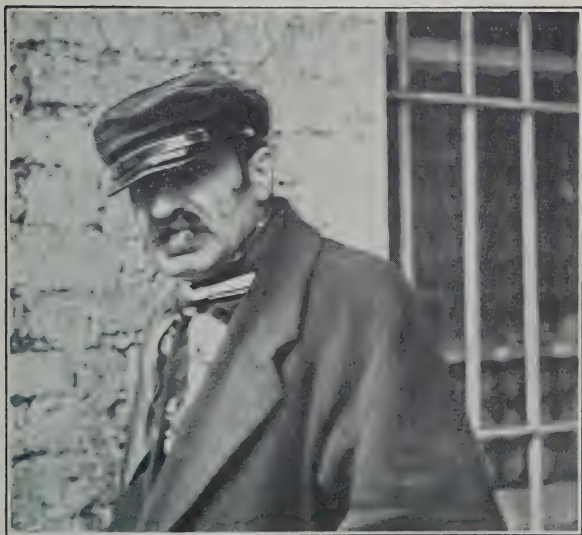
‘Why artists’ necessities?’

‘Because Serge is an artist. Perhaps among his many acquaintances we may learn something either about him or about the woman.’

I obtained permission to use one of the many taxicabs which the Préfecture of police uses for special work, and put on shabby clothes with brass buttons and a chauffeur’s cap. Thus altered — I had almost written disguised, but I loathe the word — we started.



H. ASHTON-WOLFE AS HIMSELF



H. ASHTON-WOLFE AS AN APACHE

Showing his appearance when investigating the murder of Don Ramon. One eye was made up to look like an inflamed hollow with an ugly scar running up the right cheek to the eyebrow.





First we drove to the tailor whose name was on the suit of man's clothing found in Madame Delavigne's flat.

The manager looked askance at Bannister and myself, but a sight of my badge made him eager to oblige. Running through his book he quickly found the entry. Neither Bannister nor I was prepared for the result, however.

The suit had been made for Don Ramon Valdez y Cazal, three months earlier. Again that vague, subconscious, fleeting thought, that failed to take shape, passed — and was gone. I looked at my companion, who merely shook his head. Then, after a moment, he said:

'He must have visited her sometimes and kept a change of clothes there — but why? Now we must see if the key in the pocket was that of his apartment. That would explain how the woman entered whilst he was absent.'

This was at once ascertained. The Yale key fitted and opened the door of the apartment in the Rue la Boétie. Another link in the chain.

At the police station of the Boulevard Saint-Germain, where Serge Ordinoff had spent the night, we met the Brigadier, who had been informed that we were coming. His nose was in a bad state and his temper was accordingly short. To my surprise he did not remark sarcastically upon our appearance. In a few words I told him about the diary and the clothes.

'Possible,' he growled. 'The woman was the instigator I daresay, but the Russian bear com-

mitted the deed. He shall be well "cuisiné,"<sup>1</sup> that devil. He has been sobbing all night and calling on his Martina. He is a mixture of bear and fool. Now he shall perform. Come.'

When we entered the cell, the prisoner rose with red, swollen eyes and pale face. The Brigadier looked grimly at him.

'So — tears, eh? Well, that is better than biting noses.'

'Did I do that, monsieur?' the Russian replied gravely. 'I am deeply grieved; I was mad — mad. But perhaps you also have loved and will understand.'

Rousseau stared suspiciously, but it was not the prisoner's intention to be sarcastic. He really appeared sorry for his violence of the day before. Seeing him in this mood, the Brigadier began to question him skilfully. It was soon apparent that the man had only one fear and that was for the woman he loved so madly.

We had now to ascertain whether the portrait in the studio was truly that of Madame Delavigne, although we all instinctively felt that it was. The resemblance to the dead man was no coincidence. I had given orders that several photographic copies should be prepared immediately. These were ready when Bannister called and I had taken them with me. Abruptly Rousseau asked:

'What was Madame Delavigne to you?'

'I loved her, monsieur,' the man replied, 'and she had lately promised to marry me.'

<sup>1</sup> Police slang for the 'third degree.'

'This portrait,' continued the Brigadier, 'which you have in your studio — did you paint it for her or for yourself?'

The man looked up in surprise.

'You have seen the portrait? Is she not beautiful? I painted it for myself to gaze upon when she was not there.'

I showed him one of the copies, and he snatched at it eagerly.

'May I keep this, monsieur? It would make me very happy.'

Poor devil — he was hopelessly infatuated, and I naturally consented.

'In return,' I said, 'tell us what was Don Ramon — her brother?'

'I do not know,' the Russian answered. 'She would never speak about him, but he was certainly not her brother — sometimes I thought she loved him and again I imagined that he was her enemy.'

'But surely,' I insisted, 'you noticed the resemblance, the extraordinary resemblance between them.'

This time the Russian was startled. 'No, monsieur — I have never seen them together. Only lately did I know for certain that there was another man in her life — and found out who he was — but I saw him only from a distance.'

'But you stabbed him — wounded him,' I said. The Russian shook his head.

'No, monsieur.'

So for a while we continued to question him. Although he did not actually confess, he did not try

to shield himself. On the contrary, he very cunningly replied in a manner calculated to produce the impression that he was the guilty one. After a time Rousseau noticed this, too, for suddenly he said:

‘Well, we have caught your Madame Delavigne. We will see what she has to say.’

On the instant the humble, almost pathetic demeanour of the prisoner changed to fierce rage. With a howl he sprang at the Brigadier and we had much ado to keep him off. Several police came in at our call and in a few moments a belt with handcuffs, that held the hands of the raging prisoner firmly to his sides, was put on him, but all further questions were useless, neither threats nor soft words moved him. He had become sullen and dumb. At last we decided to leave him.

At the door Bannister turned and said: ‘Well, it is apparent that she did not love you — this Madame Martina — for we caught her just as she was leaving France for good. She merely laughed when we told her that you had been arrested.’

At the words the man Serge groaned and dropped his head.

‘Alas,’ he said, ‘I fear it is true — she did not love me, although I would have died for her with joy.’

We saw that we should obtain nothing further that day. Outside the Brigadier stopped and exchanged a few words with the commissaire, and asked him to treat the man kindly, telling him that the belt could be safely removed now that we had gone. Fiery old Rousseau — that kindly thought

endeared him to me. Before separating I told him that the thumb-prints on the blade had been enlarged and were at his disposal. Bannister and I then went to the studio in the Rue Sausaigne. Here we found one of the Brigadier's men at work. The studio was being carefully searched. The papers and clothing of the Russian had already been removed. I knew that this part of the investigation could be safely left to the Sûreté. Although we did not believe Serge Ordinoff guilty, one never knew what might be discovered. All our energies, however, were now directed towards finding the woman Martina.

We spent the day interviewing all the people likely to know anything about her, but without result. At last I said:

'Look here, it is evident she led a very secretive existence. We had better go and examine all her wardrobe. By the quality of the dresses and shoes we may gain some insight into her life. Also the names of the modistes and dressmakers on them may help. The concierge says that Madame Delavigne had no maid; that she did most of the cleaning for her; all her meals were taken elsewhere, therefore some of the restaurants and cafés must know her. I will take a piece of jewellery and call on as many as possible describing the woman and telling the "gérant" and waiters that the trinket was left by her in my taxicab. You had better find out if the dresses were paid for by cheque and on which bank. Wherever she is she will need money. If her account is closed, she has left France; if not, a watch at the bank may help.'



So we drove to the Rue des Moulins where one of Rousseau's men was patiently lounging and watching.

The dresses were certainly curious. Several were splendid creations from one of the leading firms in the Rue de la Paix. Mixed at haphazard among them, however, were such garments as a poor working girl or a servant would wear. The shoes and linen were as varied as the dresses. Hats there were only one or two. At the sight of a gorgeous lace mantilla from old Spain, Bannister whistled.

'That is a present from Don Ramon, I should imagine. Evidently this creature led a strange life. Look, there is a get-up such as a real "gigolette" of the outer boulevards could wear and please her apache friends.'

I said nothing — certainly we had a difficult search before us. If Madame Delavigne had friends among the Paris underworld, she could disappear at will for years.

I had left instructions for one of my assistants to come to the apartment and carry out the minute work upon which so much depended. As he had not arrived, I examined all the dresses and shoes with a powerful lens. Bannister looked on curiously.

'What do you expect to find?' he asked.

'I am hoping to find the shoes she wore when she left that mark on the carpet in the Spaniard's room. Of course she may not have changed her shoes, but if she came home with the intention of fleeing, she would probably do so. All these have been carefully

cleaned — but not lately.' And I pointed to the neat array in a cupboard.

'We will ask the concierge, who did most of the work for her, if she has cleaned any since the murder.'

To our question she pointed to a pair of black patent leather shoes, standing on a window ledge.

'Madame always left her dirty shoes and the clothes to be brushed and put away, in the corridor, near the servants' entrance. These and a dark costume which madame had only lately bought were there when I went up in the morning. I did not go into her room because I thought she would still be asleep. When madame went away she locked all her doors, but left me the key to the corridor.'

We wrapped up the shoes and carried them away with us. Our next call was on the firm in the Rue de la Paix.

From them we obtained the name of the bank where her account was, the Banco del Rio de la Plata in the Avenue of the Opéra. The manager admitted that a considerable sum, nearly a hundred thousand francs, still stood to the credit of madame — no large cheque had been drawn during the last month.

Then began our search of the cafés and restaurants. It was only when we came to some of the more shady places near the Place de la République that here and there a 'chasseur' or a waiter had seen her, but not lately. In a small café where only youths of a certain class gather, this Madame Martina was well known. Here at last a mincing

lad of barely eighteen, with painted lips like a woman, told me with a smirk that he knew her well.

'Sometimes she came as a "grande dame" and again as a "pierreuse." Where she lived I don't know,' he said. 'But if you have the pluck to go to "le caveau de Bibi" you are sure to find her. Only don't show those sparklers there, or it's "bonne nuit" for you.'

I knew well the infamous haunt of thieves and brethren of the knife. It would never do to go as we were.

After leaving the taxi in a garage, we used Banister's beautifully equipped 'changing room.' From it we emerged — I as a spurious carpenter with peg-top corduroy trousers, red sash and peaked cap: he as an apache, complete with striped jersey and neckcloth. We were both wearing thick leather garments of my own design next to our skins, and in our pockets we each carried a heavy Smith & Wesson. I knew 'Bibi the terror' and his den. What such a woman could possibly want there was a mystery. The 'caveau' — an evil-smelling cellar tavern — was reached by passing through a stable and a tiny back alley. I knew also that one of the 'emergency' exits for its clients led to the vast sewers criss-crossing old Paris. Truly a cheerful place. It had been raided several times, but without the least result. Bibi — the head of an organisation for wholesale murder and pillage — specialised in the robbing of lonely country houses. Once he had been caught and sentenced to death, but escaped from prison in a most mysterious manner. A warder had

been implicated and punished. Since then the police had searched for him in vain. I told Bannister that if, by a lucky chance, he was 'at home,' we should leave our quest for a moment, and take him — if we could.

'He is wanted for more than five different killings, isn't he?' he asked.

'Yes,' I said, 'five of which we are sure — and the Lord knows how many besides which have never been discovered.'

We found the stable after a little trouble. Inside all was pitch-dark. Flashing a pocket lamp around I saw that the door leading to the alley was unbolted. I was about to open it when my friend stopped me. Pointing to the hinges he said, with a smile. 'When that door opens a bell rings somewhere. Look — see the little wire screwed to that piece of blackened metal? Now if we take that contact off, we stand some chance of a surprise visit.'

'Yes,' I replied sarcastically, 'but the surprise would be for us. It would be equal to telling the charming gentlemen below that we are — well — not exactly friendly. No — let the bell ring and leave the talking to me. I know their "argot."'

As soon as the door had shut behind us and we were in the little back street, which had no other entrance nor exit, houses being built across it at each end, two dark forms came up to us without saying a word. Taking no notice of them, although I guessed that open knives were up their sleeves, I growled in a hoarse voice to Bannister in the vile thieves' slang, 'Now you see — here — les vaches — the police —

cannot get you. Les aminches — our pals — will see to that.' Then with a careless slam I opened the big wooden flap leading to the cellar.

'Quiet — quiet — friends,' said a voice at the bottom of the stairs, 'No need to wake everybody.'

I laughed sneeringly. 'Sorry if I disturbed your slumbers. Perhaps a "perroquet" or a little glass of brandy will make up for that.'

But we were not to pass so easily.

A lamp shone in my face and the point of an ugly-looking knife pressed against my stomach, edge upwards.

'Le mot d'ordre — the password — quick.'

'I haven't been here for some time — the last one was "Vive l'anarchie,"' I countered, hoping to bluff this watch-dog.

Luckily Bannister could see him, thanks to the light reflected from my face. The keen blade was already pressing home for an upward sweep when I heard the dull thud of a beautiful right hook to the chin and the fellow collapsed without even a groan.

Bannister stooped down and picked up the knife. 'This'll be a little memento. Go on, we can go in now.'

For a moment I hesitated. 'I don't suppose we shall come out alive,' I said. 'There must be all kinds of signs and things which we don't know.' Before my friend could answer, we heard a harsh laugh above us, the wooden flap slammed down and a bolt shot home, whilst inside a bell rang stridently. We had quite forgotten the two men above. Drawing our pistols we kicked open the door in front of us



and stepped into the place, stooping nearly double. It was lucky that we did so — half a dozen bottles crashed against the wall over our heads. At the same moment the big lamp in the centre went out. Stepping quickly apart, we held our pocket torches above us, taking care to move them constantly from side to side. If once we were deprived of their light, our end was certain. The caveau was a large place with a bar running along one side of it, and many chairs and tables strewn about. At the opposite end were some ten or twelve men, all of the villainous type which Paris so abundantly produces. Although several had revolvers, I could see that they did not wish to use them unless forced — I guessed that was because the detonations might bring the hated police. Without more ado, I shouted, 'Hands up, all of you — we have every exit guarded.'

The words unleashed a rush of wild beasts. Chairs, bottles, and knives crashed and sang around us. I heard Bannister give a groan and his pistol began to spit redly.

'The trapdoor at the other end!' I yelled in English 'We must gain the sewers — it's our only hope. Take note of the direction and put your lamp out as often as you can.'

In a zigzag rush, bending double and firing, we gained an opening in the floor down which we heard feet clattering. Pulling the heavy wooden flap after us I felt for and found a large bolt.

For the moment we were safe, although how many men were down below I did not know. In a whisper I asked, 'Are you hurt?'

'No,' came a cheerful voice, 'but if I hadn't put on your patent chest protector one of the knives they threw would have got me sure — the point just pricked me. Well, what do we do now?'

'We must follow one of the main sewer channels and try to find a man-hole.'

Slowly we crept down the rotten steps. Once clear of the trapdoor, we edged carefully along the narrow stone path, flashing our lights around. Beside us flowed a dark stream of Seine water, which swept with it all the refuse. Luckily the air in the Paris sewers is breathable, if not exactly pleasant. After a long and painful search, we found an iron staircase leading to a round cover. This we lifted and so gained the streets once more. When we were safely in Bannister's rooms, I saw that, instead of just a prick, he had received a nasty cut. But for that hard leather he would have been killed.

Several more days were spent in searching and hoping that the men posted at the bank and in every likely place might achieve a capture, but in vain. Neither could the Brigadier report any tangible result. Yet one more proof that the woman Martina did actually enter Don Ramon's apartment we did gain, which also gave us the hour of her visit. One of the shoes we had carried away from the Rue des Moulins exactly fitted the muddy imprint on the carpet, which had been carefully measured and photographed. Since it had rained only between five and six on the day of the murder and Don Ramon had returned shortly after seven, her visit must have taken place between five and seven. But

that was as far as we got. Finally I asked my chief for an interview, which he granted me the same evening. I felt sure that somehow he would help us.

Since I had really been assisting Bannister, I had not made any report to Dr. Bertillon, who was, I knew, busy on another case.

He listened to me gravely for a whole hour while I went over the various phases of our investigation. Now and then he held up his hand to stop me, and rising would pace up and down thoughtfully.

When I told him of our adventure in the cellar tavern, he smiled grimly.

'One of these days there will be a short note in the Sûreté records, and it will be, "Missing — probably dead, a young assistant and head of the photographic section named —" well, we know whose name will follow. You are too fond of these little trips into the nether regions. I think that when this matter of Don Ramon is settled we will try to sweep out that nest of infamy. Bibi the terror, has been at large too long.

'Your tale is a strange one, but surely you begin dimly to feel the truth? *Non?* Well, then I will say nothing as yet. You have the photograph of the painting and that of the murdered man? Let me see them.'

I gave them to Dr. Bertillon.

'Let me have one of those letters found in the studio, too, and the diary. Also the various enlargements of imprints, classified and dated. Then call back to-morrow — you can do nothing further for

the moment. It is useless to try to find this woman in Paris.'

I looked my surprise.

'I feel certain of that. Don Ramon comes from Toledo, does he not? Well, the best thing that you can do is to go to Toledo. Arrange to leave to-morrow, after I have examined all the data. It may just possibly be unnecessary, but if I do not come to a definite opinion, that is where you must gather the threads. Interview his former friends. His fellow officers — his family. Obtain a clear report of his past life. Then I think that we shall discover who killed him. Here in Paris the scent is stale.'

'And Miss Holbein?' I asked.

'Oh, she knows — if not all the truth, at least most of it; but she had nothing to do with the crime. I shall see Monsieur de Kersac to-morrow and try to obtain her release. If I fail to convince him of her innocence, then she will have to wait until you return. Let your American friend go carefully over the ground again whilst you are away. Those missing pages must be found — unless they have been destroyed. To-morrow morning telephone me and let me know what time the train leaves and I will arrange to see you before.'

Dr. Bertillon held out his hand with a kindly smile. I knew it was useless to question him; he would say nothing until he was quite sure.

The next morning I had the various results of our researches, such as they were, sent to my chief. The thumb-prints on the blade found by the Brigadier had been identified. They were those of the Russian

Serge Ordinoff, whose finger-prints had in the meantime been taken. All the others were now definitely proven to have been made by Don Ramon himself. The letters and diary were also taken to Dr. Bertillon.

I then had a long conversation with Bannister, who, after the first surprise at my departure was past, agreed that probably my chief was right. He requested to be allowed to be present at the interview before I left, so together we drove to the doctor's house. Here we found Lebrun, who had made a report on the poison submitted to him for analysis.

After greeting the American, whom I knew he admired greatly for his untiring energy, Dr. Bertillon said, pointing to the little blue paper package on his table:

'Lebrun has identified this poison. It is a native preparation, made by the Obeah men in the West Indies. Although the law severely punishes them for it, they still make it. They call it "Kamaloï" and surround its manufacture with great mystery and obscene ceremonies. No one knows what it really is, but Lebrun here thinks that the juice of a species of *Euphorbia* is present. It kills instantly.' Then, signing to Lebrun to withdraw, he pointed to two comfortable chairs and asked us to sit down.

'Now, Monsieur Bannister, your friend there will go to Toledo to-day. I have given orders for a thorough search. Perhaps we may yet find the missing pages of the diary. They probably contain the true story.



‘You, Monsieur Ashton-Wolfe, will direct your energies towards laying bare the past life of the dead man as minutely as possible. Try to obtain a psychological portrait of him as well. Above all, find out if he has ever been in the West Indies. I am going to tell you nothing of the opinion I have formed because I do not want you to be biased. Find out all you can and as quickly as possible. Report anything important by telegram. Your friend Monsieur Blanchard in Monte Carlo is also sending me a report from there — Don Ramon possessed a pretty villa at Roquebrune and spent several weeks every winter in the South. By the way — it is very unfortunate for the American lady, but André Colbert has now reconstructed her movements on the day of the murder. She was watching the house of Don Ramon from inside a taxicab stationed opposite the house for several hours. The driver has been found and has identified her. He says that she was very pale and agitated. He drove her from the Rue Voltaire to the Rue la Boétie. He was told to wait, but to be ready to start off the moment she told him, and that he would probably have to follow a woman whom she would point out. Twice during the long wait Miss Holbein got out and walked across the street into the house which it was obvious that she was watching. Once she remained inside for ten minutes. He also noticed that she was observing the windows with a small opera-glass. At last a woman came out very rapidly and hurried towards the Saint-Lazare Station. At the sight of her, his fare rapped on the front window

of his cab and, pointing her out, signed to him to follow. He did so. At the station the other woman also hailed a taxi, which she dismissed in the Rue des Moulins. Miss Holbein immediately stopped him and jumped out, telling him to wait. Afraid that he might not be paid, he watched closely where she went. He saw her go up to this other woman and speak sharply to her. After a few moments' conversation he was startled to see the woman he had followed raise her hand and strike Miss Holbein in the face and then, turning, enter a house. His client came back deathly pale and trembling violently, either from rage or fear, he could not say which, because it was then almost dark.

'She paid him, dropping her bag in her agitation.

'A shopkeeper, who had also noticed the incident, says that Miss Holbein waited for a long while outside the house into which the woman had gone.

'Finally he saw a man come out. Miss Holbein seized him by the arm and spoke to him, and then, pushing him from her with both hands, she ran away. The man seemed dazed and several times carried his hand to his forehead. Then he walked slowly away.

'Because of this fresh evidence Monsieur de Kersac cannot release Miss Holbein. However it is really splendid evidence, quite confirming my theory.

'Now, bon voyage — and I hope your report will complete what I already know.'

Bannister accompanied me to the train, saying little — I could see that he was as perplexed as I

was. I had a letter to the chief of police in Toledo in my pocket, so, as soon as I arrived, late the next evening, I wrote a note to him, which I instructed the night porter to deliver early in the morning. Then, tired out, and with my thoughts in a whirl, I went to my room.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE OTHER WOMAN

COUNT RODRIGUEZ DEL PUENTE was my one remaining hope. Thread after thread had snapped. I had interviewed the chief of police, Señor Perez. He was obliging and affable — but useless. The family of Valdez y Casal were very powerful and wealthy aristocrats. It was but natural that, according to Spanish tradition, they were immune. Anything he knew was not for my ears. The mother, a proud old lady, was cold and distant. Dressed in deep mourning for her son, she politely bade me good-day, as soon as I mentioned why I had come. Her son was dead. Nothing else mattered; the French police must do the best they could.

Everywhere I encountered the same reserve and hauteur. Tired and discouraged, I had returned to the hotel, where to my surprise I found a brief note in a feminine hand, telling me that if I wished to know something concerning Don Ramon — initials only were given — I had better see Count Rodriguez del Puente, formerly of the Royal Dragoons, living in the Calle Isabella Catolica.

I at once sent a polite letter begging for an interview. A reply was handed to me within an hour. El Señor Rodriguez del Puente would see me at eight o'clock. It was then seven, so I set out immediately.

When I entered the room where the Count was waiting and saw the man who greeted me courte-

ously, I knew at once that my journey had not been in vain. Don Rodriguez was a man about forty, tall and soldierly looking, with deep lines of suffering running from a thin-lipped, sneering mouth. The smile with which he asked me to be seated was cruel and sensuous.

‘Señor, I know already why you have come, although I do not know who sent you to me, nor shall I ask. I have heard of the death of my former comrade — that foul — but no, I will not waste time in vain insults. His evil soul must now answer for its misdeeds. Tell me, caballero, what you wish to know. He was once my friend — and yet never was there a man I hated more — entonces ——’

I felt my heart beat fast. What injury had this proud Spaniard suffered to speak thus to a stranger. I thought it best to be frank, and so I related what had taken place in Paris, and that, unable to find the woman whom we believed guilty of having killed Don Ramon, my chief had sent me to Toledo to find out what I could of the dead man’s past. The hidalgo laughed bitterly when I had concluded.

‘Your pardon, señor — I do not laugh at you — no — but at myself. That woman ruined my life. The tale will be long. There beside you are cigarillos — make yourself comfortable and listen. I must ask you first, however, not to use my name if this story is to remain in the Sûreté records — you promise me? Bueno. I would not tell you anything at all were it not that you have informed me of the unhappy señorita of the Opéra who is imprisoned,



and also of that poor Russian. Another one — he — who can call me brother! Pues — some years ago I was young, wealthy, and happy. Then in Madrid on an evil day I met a beautiful girl named — no, the name does not matter. I first saw her at the corrida — the bull-fight — where with parted lips and straining eyes she watched the famous matador Bombita in the arena. I too was then an “*aficionado*” — a lover of that duel between man and beast. I obtained an introduction. She was an orphan, she told me, living alone with a female companion, a huge masculine-looking creature who watched my ever-growing infatuation with a mocking smile. I did not meet my “*Carmencita*” very frequently. She travelled often. Nevertheless I saw that she looked upon me with kindness. But I will not weary you. One evening — she had just returned after a long absence — I obtained her promise to become my wife. I was mad with joy. In Spain, señor, it is not customary for a caballero — a gentleman — to kiss his affianced until the marriage ceremony has taken place. But I lost my head — we were alone when she consented to marry me. I pressed her to my breast and kissed her passionately, and to my delight she returned my burning kisses.

‘We were married — yes — with all the pomp and ceremony of the Catholic Church. I too was alone — my mother and father have long been dead, so that I did not have to defer to them. I turned a deaf ear to the vague murmurings of my friends and relations who wished to know more about this girl.

And at the railway station — as we were about to leave on our honeymoon — she disappeared.'

Don Rodriguez wiped his damp forehead, and, rising, paced the room for a few moments. When he was a little calmer, he sat down and continued:

'It seems a little thing to say, does it not, señor? — so trivial. She disappeared! . . . But my family name is an ancient one and we have never stained it, nor has anyone besmirched it; and I loved her — loved her madly. To me it was a most dreadful catastrophe. For days I was crazed. The police did all they could, but in vain. The earth had opened and swallowed her. The dueña, her companion, we found. She had gone to Sevilla before the wedding, she said, and knew nothing. It was true — she had left the day previously. Well — weeks passed. At last came the news that a woman answering to "Carmencita's" description had been seen in Alexandria. There I went as fast as train and boat could take me. The private agent I employed met me in Marseilles, where he had picked up the trail. When I reached Egypt, I found several people who had seen her — with a man, they said — and I vowed to kill that man. But again she was gone, leaving no trace. Several times, in the dreary year that followed, I reached various places where she had been living — always too late. But now I no longer sought her to claim her as my wife — but to kill a monster. Orgies unspeakable and scandal upon scandal marked the road she had taken. Then at last, in the island of Haiti in the West Indies, rumours of a new priestess who presided at the obscene devil worship of the

natives were brought to me. A white woman — very beautiful — who had suddenly appeared and forsworn herself to voodooism. The temple where the child-strangling and sex orgies took place was hidden in the bush. After much bribing, a native woman, who said that her grandson had been stolen by the voodoo priests, offered to guide me part of the way — more she dared not do. Arming ourselves, my servant and I rode out at dawn. In the afternoon, the old woman, who had walked with us — one cannot travel fast in the bush — left us, after pointing out the way. By sundown we came to a large clearing. In the centre of this was a huge circular hut of rough logs with a thatched roof. Tying our horses to a tree, we advanced slowly and cautiously. Inside the place drums were beating furiously while a constant wailing told us that some foul ceremony was taking place. When we were within a few yards of the reed-filled entrance, we pulled out our pistols and with a yell and a rush we were inside.

‘On a raised platform at the opposite end was a woman, and she was holding the body of a young girl, a child, high in the air, showing it to the panting, struggling multitude of natives surrounding her. Without hesitation I fired at the blood-stained creature. At the shot she gave a shrill cry and staggered back, dropping the babe. I saw blood trickle from her hand. Then the black horde, already drunk with rum and blood, swirled and raged around us. We fought for our lives, back to back. Luckily the shrieking, howling mob was unarmed,

and our pistols soon drove them back. Slowly we fought our way into the open; the woman had been seized by two priests; what became of her I do not know. We managed to return, torn, bruised, and wounded, after setting fire to the loathsome temple: but for nearly a month I was in the mission hospital, with brain fever, helpless. When I recovered, I left at once and came to Spain. But something had snapped inside me. I no longer cared if the she-devil I had married was dead or alive. It was about a year later — I had joined the Royal Dragoons — when I met Don Ramon Valdez. One day I heard that a young officer from Toledo had just arrived and I went to greet him. When I saw him, it was as though a red-hot knife had pierced me. My brain reeled and an icy chill ran through my veins as I touched his hand. A vision from the past had come to mock me. The resemblance was so startling that it could be no mere coincidence! I must have looked ghastly — for he asked me if I felt ill.

‘In his eyes there was no recognition; but, señor, *I knew — I knew* — like a flash I guessed the truth. Ah, and you too, señor, you begin to see? But I said nothing. I had to be quite sure before acting. So I began to watch — day and night. I became his best friend — yes — his constant companion, and I watched. I felt that I must have absolute proof of what I now knew was the truth. Ah, you start — yes — Don Ramon and the sweet girl I had married *were one and the same*. Yes — although my soul sickened at the thought, I realised that Don Ramon and that foul blood-drinking voodoo priest-



DON RAMON WHEN POSSESSED BY  
THE PERSONALITY OF MME.  
DELAVIGNE

From a photograph found in her flat.



SERGE ORDINOFF

From a photograph taken after his arrest.





ess *were also one being*. He was possessed of two souls — he was both man and woman. And I soon obtained the proof I desired.

‘At certain periods he would become listless: his eyes had a far-away look; when spoken to he did not answer; and then at night he would creep out — to a room in town — and emerge as a woman with a woman’s instincts and desires. At last came the end. One day he brutally, callously provoked and killed one of his comrades, Manuel Cordova, in a duel. I went to his room that night and found it empty. In the regimental chapel, where the dead officer was lying, I saw by the light of the wax tapers that a woman, the twin soul of Don Ramon, dressed in black, was on her knees beside the bier and sobbing. So I returned and waited in his room. At two in the morning he came in. He had changed into his uniform, but his eyes were red with weeping. Without a word I drew my sword. He threw himself to his knees and begged my forgiveness. He confessed that he was one of those strange, weird beings — androgynous in body and soul — who are cursed with a dual personality and who are both male and female. For years the female part of him had been predominant and only rarely had the male fought his way to the surface. Lately a change had taken place. His manhood had reasserted itself victoriously. That was why he had become a soldier. But still at times — less frequently now — the female personality would take entire possession of him, would drive out the man, and live as a woman. He hated this creature who inhabited his brain and

body. What was more awful was that only vaguely did he remember what had taken place whilst thus possessed. For several years he had fled from town to town, from country to country, submerged ever and again, but yet struggling and fighting for his manhood. That was why he had quarrelled with and killed his comrade Cordova. He had felt, he had subconsciously foreseen, that his feminine soul was becoming enamoured of this man. But the excitement and the reaction had liberated his twin self. As a man he had killed Cordova, but as a woman he had loved and mourned him. Of the wrong done to me he swore that he knew nothing. Thus Don Ramon poured out his grief and his heartbreak to me that night. And as he spoke, so my anger cooled, but loathing and horror took its place. This was not a human being grovelling and pleading before me. It was a monster escaped from Dante's *Inferno*. I have heard of abnormal creatures — brother and sister — grown together and sharing one heart — one body — but still two separate entities. Here was that dreadful thing — two souls, brother and sister — sharing one body, which outwardly appeared normal. Ah, señor, I hated him; but I pitied him too. God forbid that such a curse should be laid on anyone else in this world.

'He left the army at once and promised me never to return to Spain. On that understanding I held my tongue. I believe, señor, that now he has killed himself, wishing either as a man to destroy the woman or as a woman to destroy the man. Thank Heaven, they are both dead! What sins had his fa-

thers committed, to thus damn for ever the son? Or was his life the expiation?’

Silently I rose — and, silently shaking hands with the Count, I left.

There was no need to telegraph to Dr. Bertillon; he already knew the truth. I understood at last why he had said, ‘It is useless to search for the woman in France.’

Of course it was obvious enough now. Several times we had vaguely felt that there was something abnormal; something, which caused our nerves to tense and our skins to creep, when we stood before that portrait: but we should never alone have arrived at the whole truth.

Even now I failed to see how we could ever prove the truth of this story told by Don Rodriguez to such a matter-of-fact man as the investigating judge. However, I relied on Dr. Bertillon to do that.

I returned with all speed to Paris. It would be a waste of time to try to obtain any confirmation of the story from the mother or the family doctor. Undoubtedly they knew everything, but they more than anyone would keep the truth from prying strangers. No — we would do what remained to be done in Paris, now that the key to the mystery had been given to me.

I had sent a telegram to Bannister and he met me at the station.

‘Dr. Bertillon is waiting for us in his office,’ he said when we had shaken hands, ‘and he begs that you will make your report there. Colbert and the Brigadier are also there. I can see that you have

big news, but I promised to wait. Only let us hurry.'

I found my chief waiting for us. Before him were several documents and all the various traces composing the evidence which we had collected.

When we were seated, Dr. Bertillon began, addressing us all:

'Now, messieurs, before our colleague Ashton-Wolfe tells his story, let us go briefly over the details collected by our own investigation. You will then more easily understand and believe what he has to say.

'Don Ramon Valdez is discovered dead in his library. He has been poisoned. That is apparent and confirmed by the doctor. One glass only was on the table and the contents of only one glass were missing from the decanter. He was lying with his head on a book of mental diseases, which he had been reading or was about to read.

'Therefore he was alone when he drank. Now why did you not take the trouble to read that book, Monsieur Colbert — you were once my pupil. It would have cleared up the case immediately. Here is the book. It is by that great man Dr. Charcot and deals with strange cases of dual personalities observed by him. No, do not interrupt me! He calls them "*Les Hermaphrodites psychiques*." The chapter which Don Ramon was reading is heavily scored in pencil, and must have been read again and again; for if you shut the book and open it at hazard it readily opens at that part. It describes the extraordinary life led by a young girl from Brit-



tany, Ivonne Keradec, who for several years was a sailor before the mast on a French trading vessel. No one had the least idea that she was not a man. She drank, she smoked, and she had sweethearts among the girls in the various ports of call. She disappeared on the eve of her wedding. The 'girl' she was to have married discovered her years later in Bordeaux. She had then discarded her male garments, was married to a young naval officer, and appeared to have quite forgotten the former "wife to be." Now, under the circumstances, taking into consideration the strange contradictory evidence found in the case we are engaged upon, that story should have been illuminating. It was the starting-point. Why should a man like Don Ramon read such a peculiar book? He who was known to have only two interests in life: women and horses. Then you find a portrait of the man cut and slashed. The stiletto used for this foolish deed bears several finger-prints on the handle, but these turn out to be those of Don Ramon. A woman's shadow has been seen on the blind of his window. A woman was known to have called on the day of the murder. His bookcase was broken open, yet nowhere are there any imprints found but those of the dead man. Why should he destroy his own portrait, why should he break open his own bookcase, the key of which was in his pocket, unless he was in an abnormal condition when he did so? Then there is this very strange diary. It was for this that the bookcase was broken open, and the leaves which were torn out had been burned in the anthracite stove of

the dining-room. Chemical analysis has proved that. What should a stranger have known of the diary — least of all Miss Holbein, who, not knowing Spanish, would have carried away the whole book? True, there are the letters which she wrote to Don Ramon; but an angry woman often threatens and writes foolish things.

‘The perfumed handkerchief belonged to the female Don Ramon. That Miss Holbein used the same perfume may be a mere coincidence or perhaps Don Ramon gave it to her. The glove was Don Ramon’s. I am not blaming you, Monsieur Colbert, but you acted hastily; the only justification you have is the poison found in the American lady’s room. Yet, had you examined the watermark on the blue paper in which it was wrapped, you would have seen that it bore the words, “*Fabrica reale Toledo.*” Never omit to examine such trifles as wrapping-paper. Then there is the evidence of the chauffeur and the shopkeeper. That for me completed the case and cleared the singer.

‘Now, Brigadier, we have your investigation. I must compliment you on the clever way in which you discovered the existence of the Russian, but surely the wound which he gave the woman Martina and which Don Ramon bore home on the same night should have opened your eyes. You also very cleverly found the secret drawer from which the paper containing the poison had been taken. *A secret drawer*, Monsieur Rousseau; and on the edge of the paper a thumb-mark made by Don Ramon! Surely only he would know of the poison hidden in that

drawer. It is highly improbable that he would have told any stranger about it. Now, Monsieur Bannister, and you, Monsieur Ashton-Wolfe; you held the threads of both investigations; you even saw the portrait. You also heard the Russian say that he had never seen Don Ramon simultaneously with this Madame Delavigne. You found the man's clothing in the woman's flat and the imprint of a muddy boot on the carpet in the library, where the dead man was discovered. Yet you never looked to see if his boots did not also fit the mark. Well, well. Let us hope that we have all learned something from this case. Now I will give you the corroboration which I have here, and then our colleague can tell us what he learned in Spain.'

Dr. Bertillon pulled a document from the sheaf before him. 'First, Monsieur Blanchard, of the Monte Carlo Sûreté, says that a woman was known to have lived in the Villa des Oliviers which belonged to Don Ramon. She often came to the tables, *but never together with Don Ramon*. Her extraordinary resemblance to the Spaniard was noticed and commented upon. Monsieur Blanchard says that he had the feeling that there was something queer about this woman; but neither she nor the man had ever given any cause for his department to trouble about them.

Here is the report of the medical experts who examined the dead man. They are more to blame than anyone. I will not read it all, but the sum of it is that Don Ramon was physically androgynous — with the feminine development strongly marked.

He bore the scar of a recent wound on the right shoulder. One of his teeth, a first upper molar on the right side, was gold-filled. He had also a large scar at the base of the right hand — probably inflicted by a pistol bullet of large calibre. The lobes of the brain were strangely divided and abnormally developed in the parts generally believed by medical men to control the sex emotions. Bien! Now for the last act. I have asked Monsieur Dufresne to conduct Serge Ordinoff and Miss Holbein here. We will first interview the man.'

At the words the Brigadier sprang up:

'In that case, monsieur le docteur, see that he is firmly strapped in a straitjacket. He is a Russian bear — he almost bit off my nose.'

'Never fear, Brigadier, he will do you no harm here. Before he comes in, Monsieur Ashton-Wolfe let us have your report.'

All listened eagerly while I related my interview with Don Rodriguez. When I had finished, Dr. Bertillon pointed to the medical book.

'Did I not say that the nucleus of the case was here? The story Don Ramon was reading almost coincides with his own. That is what he meant when he wrote in the diary that Miss Holbein could save him. He believed that marriage with her would produce a change in his psychology — just as it did in the case of this girl Ivonne.'

'Now for the Russian.'

Dr. Bertillon gave an order on his private telephone, and a few minutes later Serge Ordinoff was ushered in by two stalwart police, who sat down beside him.

I looked at the poor fellow with pity, for I knew what a terrible shock was in store for him. For a few minutes Dr. Bertillon spoke gently, telling him that he would be released, since we now knew that he was innocent of causing the death of Don Ramon. At the words the man groaned — evidently he feared that the woman had confessed. Little by little — but clearly and firmly — Dr. Bertillon told him what we knew and believed. I saw his face grow paler and paler, whilst his eyes told of the agony tearing at his heart. When the report of the doctors was read out, his body was seized with a convulsive shudder, and he sank his face into his hands, while long sobs shook his gigantic frame.

At the conclusion — omitting my story — Dr. Bertillon said:

‘Take a little of this cognac, my friend, and then help us if you can. You see we know nearly everything. Had this Martina a scar on her hand?’

The Russian gulped miserably and nodded.

‘And the tooth — did you ever notice that?’

Again he nodded assent.

‘Well, then, tell us — you intended harm to Don Ramon when you broke into his room?’

‘Yes, monsieur — I was crazed with jealous rage,’ his sad voice replied. ‘I had seen the — the — woman — go in, for I was watching the house, had been watching it for days. But I did not see her leave. There must have been a back exit. I waited a long time. I had seen her shadow cross a lighted window. Then to my astonishment I saw the man, who I believed to be at home, enter the house.



Again I waited, but no woman came out. It was then dark, and whilst the concierge was away on an errand, I slipped upstairs. I could not hope to open the front door, so I tried a piece of wire on the servants' door. Finally I pushed back the bolt of a window with a palette knife, but in doing so the blade came out of the handle and dropped to the ground; I could not find it in the dark. I saw a thread of light shining from under the door of a room and went in. The man I had come to kill was lying dead across a table. I was seized with a terrible fear for — for — the woman I loved. I saw that his portrait had been slashed right across and on the table before it was a note in her handwriting, "As I destroy your image, so I hope to destroy you too." Then I knew; and, taking the note, I fled from that haunted place.'

'It was you who stabbed her once?' Dr. Bertillon asked.

'Yes; one evening I lost my head because I had seen a man enter her rooms. We went together to a hospital. For several weeks after that I did not meet her again.'

'Where did you get the poison from and why did you take it to Miss Holbein's apartment?'

The Russian hung his head while slowly a dull red crept to his cheeks.

'Once Martina showed me a little packet which she kept in her writing-desk. She said that if when we were married, I continued to be jealous, she would kill me. She told me that I should swell up like a frog. Of course I thought it was just a joke,

but, when I saw the swollen face of Don Ramon, I knew that it was no joke.

‘I broke into her rooms and, taking the packet, which I saw had been opened, I managed to leave it at Miss Holbein’s flat. I daresay you know how.’

‘Why Miss Holbein?’

‘Because I knew that Don Ramon was to have married her, but I also knew that they had quarrelled. Martina told me with a laugh, on the evening when I wounded her, that Miss Holbein would never marry the Spaniard now — because she had found out about her. That was what drove me to wounding her. I thought that Martina loved him. Oh, monsieur, tell me — for God’s sake — was there ever a Martina?’

Dr. Bertillon did not reply at once. After a few moments he said: ‘Yes, the woman existed just as surely as the man. Two souls in one body. I am sorry for you. Because of what you have suffered, we will not bring any charge against you; but it was a wicked thing to place that poison in Miss Holbein’s desk.’

Then, signing to the two police to take the man away, he added, ‘You will be released to-morrow, but you had better leave Paris and try to forget.’

When the Russian had gone, Dr. Bertillon rose and pulled a comfortable chair forward. Then he rang a bell and Miss Rachel Holbein came in accompanied by Monsieur de Kersac. We all rose and Bannister shook hands with her. It went to our hearts to see how she had changed in that short time.

As soon as she was seated, my chief said: 'Of course you know you are free, Miss Holbein. We are all deeply grieved that you should have been made to suffer so. I feel sure that both Monsieur de Kersac and Monsieur Colbert will confirm what I say.'

They both bowed silently.

'We know the truth,' Dr. Bertillon continued. 'If you feel that you cannot bear to speak of this matter, please say so — we have no right to insist. But we would like to know one thing. On the day you spoke to both the woman and Don Ramon — you knew that they were one and the same?'

'Yes,' came the answer in a whisper.

'And that is why you would not say anything?'

'I could not bear to think of what it meant' — and her voice broke — 'but I knew that he had caused his own death whilst insane, and therefore I was not harming or shielding anyone by keeping silent. I imagined that no one would ever know the truth.'

'Thank you, mademoiselle. I hope that you will forgive us, and that soon we shall hear your beautiful voice again.'

Monsieur de Kersac rose and accompanied her to the street, where a car was waiting. When he returned, Dr. Bertillon said:

'Eh bien, messieurs, that concludes the case. There is no doubt that in her subconscious mind this female part of Don Ramon felt, that with his marriage to Miss Holbein, she would cease to exist, dominated by the male. Probably subconscious

thought transmission caused by the book of Dr. Charcot. So she conceived the plan of killing the Spaniard. As a woman she entered his rooms, slashed his portrait, and poisoned the wine which he was in the habit of taking. Then, the crisis past — probably there was always a period of transition during which the one or the other was in a trance-like state, acting automatically — the man donned his own clothes, returned home — that was when Miss Holbein spoke to him — drank some of the wine, quite unsuspecting of any danger, and collapsed across the table, dead, *murdered by himself!*

‘Then you believe,’ said the judge, ‘that there were two separate entities, or, what comes to the same thing, two separate brains in that man’s body?’

‘Yes — I do. It is almost incredible — but why not? The doctor’s report confirms that theory.’

Thus ended the strangest case in all my experience.

Miss Holbein returned to her family in America, where she is now happily married.

However, one more tragedy was to result from the passing of that weird being, Don Ramon Valdez.

On going his round of the cells, the officer in charge of the local prison where the Russian Serge Ordinoff was detained, discovered that he had hanged himself with his belt from one of the bars of his window.

Like Pagliaccio in the last act, he too might have said of his love,

‘La commedia è finita!’

The record of the investigation by the Sûreté of the murder of Don Ramon and the suicide of Serge Ordinoff will be found in the 'Gazette des Tribunaux,' Paris edition, July to August, 1909.



EPISODE II  
ORSINI, THE CROUPIER  
A TALE OF MONTE CARLO



## EPISODE II

### ORSINI, THE CROUPIER

#### A TALE OF MONTE CARLO

THE inhabitants of the two little villages on the Mediterranean coast, Monaco and Monte Carlo, which have been the possession of the Princes Grimaldi for centuries, little dreamed how important for their future was that day when a well-dressed Frenchman named Monsieur Blanc stopped his carriage and walked along the shore, breathing the fragrant aroma of the pines and noting the brilliant sunshine and warmth of the winter day. Not long after, a contract was signed with the Prince of Monaco; and the Casino, which till then had flourished in Baden Baden, came into being.

With the lure of gold Monte Carlo at once sprang into prominence. Glittering palace hotels and marble villas grew with magic speed on land which until that moment had been valueless, and spreading pines and gnarled olive trees were replaced by waving palms and beautiful flowers. Great international express trains now stopped many times daily at the little wayside station and disgorged hundreds of travellers come from all lands to battle with the fickle goddess Chance: a mixed crowd, composed of blasé millionaires in search of excitement, adventurers prepared to exploit every opportunity, women young and beautiful or ugly and old and criminals

of all kinds ready to prey on the unwary. Thus at once all the elements for tragedy and debauch were gathered together and a very complex organisation sprang into being to cope with the problem of rendering and keeping the smiling, sunny pleasure resort safe and clean.

It was shortly after my initiation into this ubiquitous and powerful organisation, the Sûreté, that brotherhood, which like a secret society works unseen and undreamed of by the law-abiding citizen, but which is quick to stretch out a muscular hand to grip the evildoer, when I first encountered Giulio Orsini — the dreamer and fanatic — and the galaxy of fantastic creatures who followed him, believing him to be the 'open sesame' to easily acquired riches.

Monte Carlo attracts queer people, perhaps the queerest in the world. A walk through the crowded gambling-rooms will convince anyone of that. Every few minutes the eye is caught by some weird, freakish man or woman, who appears all the more incongruous among the many well-dressed people amusing themselves by risking a handful of gold louis for fun. The men, one realises, are obsessed by the belief that some day they will be able to grasp in their quivering hands the huge bundles of bank-notes that are so tantalisingly near. The women are generally those poor creatures who belong nowhere and to no one, and who seek to steep themselves in the evil excitement of the gambling passion, in order to escape the grey monotony of solitude. Then there

are those whose belief in a winning system is unshakeable. None of these are casual players, but 'habitués,' possessed by a monomania as a drug-taker is possessed by the craving for his daily dose of poison. At first I used to wonder why beside the railway station there was a huge lift, carrying people from the level of the trains to the path leading to the 'rooms,' for it is only a walk of some fifty short steps. But I understood, when I saw travellers arrive from some far-away country, Russia, Germany, or Austria, who had actually washed and dressed themselves in the train after their long journey, in order to be ready to enter the Casino at once, before even going to an hotel. The lift saved them almost a minute: they could enter the gambling-rooms sixty seconds sooner than if they had walked!

Is it to be wondered at, then, that such types saw in Giulio Orsini a key wherewith to unlock the gate leading to their Mecca? Orsini had been a croupier in Monte Carlo for fifteen years; several times his superiors had offered to promote him to the position of 'chef de partie,' where he would be in charge of a table, with nothing to do but to watch that the game went on according to rules and regulations, and to quell any lapse from quiet, orderly manners; notwithstanding the increase in salary which he would have received, Orsini had always refused, and requested to be allowed to remain a croupier.

He was not a man who could pass unnoticed even in such a cosmopolitan and fantastic crowd as that which daily throngs the rooms. Giulio Orsini was an Italian, born in Milan, and when I met him he was



about forty years old. His burning black eyes, accentuating the extraordinary pallor of his long, narrow face, were uncanny. Whenever I saw him I instinctively looked for a hump between his shoulders. He was not a hunchback, but there was something about his appearance, his long arms and tapering, flexible, white fingers, which created the impression that in some fashion the man cleverly hid a deformity. Probably it was the atmosphere emanating from his abnormal mind. Always I thought that Paganini, the marvellous legendary violinist, must have looked like the croupier. And this impression was justified, for Orsini came of a family of artists and it was indeed the violin which had first suggested his strange theory to him. Orsini, as we later discovered, believed firmly that since the roulette wheel revolves in obedience to a pull of the fingers, and the little ivory ball is sent rolling in the opposite direction by the same hand, years of practice, day after day, would make the croupier a virtuoso of the roulette, able to control the wheel so perfectly that the ball would always lose its momentum after the desired lapse of time and drop at a certain section of the wheel. This theory Orsini carried into practice, and but for instant action on the part of the 'surveillance,' the Casino would have lost a huge fortune.

Few people know of or guess at the perfection of the Monte Carlo Sûreté. It is invisible, but omniscient and ever present.

When the Casino opened its doors to everyone and defied the world to vanquish the roulette by

fair means, there were many who immediately set their wits to work to conceive methods for attaining this end otherwise.

When I came to Monte Carlo as a young man, the chief of the *Sûreté* was Monsieur Blanchard, a dapper little Frenchman with merry blue eyes and unassuming ways, whom the casual observer would have imagined to be a successful shopkeeper or tradesman. I had no idea then how very necessary the 'surveillance' was to the place, but soon after my *début* I saw one or two examples which convinced me that, without it, Monte Carlo would quickly become impossible.

One day I was strolling through the vast rooms watching the ever-changing crowds whom the gold lust had in its grip. I have never shaken off the impression the entrance into the rooms produces. As one passes the door where attendants verify the card of admission, a wave of warm, perfumed air envelops one and seizes on the senses. The ear is at once startled by a dull, muttering undercurrent of sound as of the sea swirling in some marine cavern; detaching itself clearly from this one hears a constant metallic cascade as though sacks of gold were being emptied on a stone floor; then comes the silvery tinkle of the ball rolling into the revolving wheel, and, cutting sharply through these complex sounds, the croupier's warning, '*Rien ne va plus,*' and the announcement of the winning number.

Approaching one of the tables, I became aware of my chief standing there busily stacking a pile of silver pieces on a number and excitedly calling to the

croupier to place a louis, which had rolled away, on zero. He appeared so engrossed in the game that I thought he had not seen me. Zero came, and Monsieur Blanchard pocketed his thirty-five gold pieces with a great show of satisfaction. I was about to walk away when he called to me over his shoulder.

'Come and look, cher ami; I am very lucky with this series.' And, holding out a card on which he inscribed the numbers as they came up, he pointed to them with his pencil. Then, when I bent to look, he said quickly in an undertone:

'There is a curious trick being tried to-day; watch the men I am going to stand next to.'

The first one he thus designed was a well-dressed man, an Englishman apparently, standing at the opposite side of the table, and playing only with gold hundred-franc pieces — 'plaques,' they are called.

Then he came back and stood for a moment behind a burly bullet-headed German wearing huge spectacles, who was near the croupier spinning the wheel.

For some minutes nothing happened; then, just as the ball rolled down, this fellow stooped and banged a five-franc piece on seventeen at the instant that the croupier announced, 'Seventeen wins.' His piece was, of course, knocked aside. 'Too late, monsieur,' he was told; but he did not seem to understand and argued volubly in German, insisting angrily on being paid. Meanwhile another croupier had raked in the bank's winnings. There were three bets on seventeen. One was a 'plaque' on the number 'en plein.'

'Whose is the "plaque"?' I heard the croupier ask. The Englishman on the other side immediately claimed it in broken French. Thereupon he received £175. I looked at Monsieur Blanchard, who signed to me to follow. Once outside he chuckled.

'Eh bien! Clever, isn't it?'

I confessed that I did not yet see what was wrong.

'No — don't you?' he said. 'Voilà, it is very simple. Those two are strangers to each other: mais oui, who would doubt it? The German has been chosen for his sharp eyes and he is quick too. On the instant that the ball enters the compartment of the winning number, he slams down his five francs, covering it. He has already done the same thing at other tables. It is knocked off and he is angry, of course, and makes a row. Naturally everyone looks at him. Under the silver coin he had cleverly hidden a 'plaque' and that the other man claims, and it is paid, because at a table so covered with gold no one noticed that it was not there before the silver piece was put down. They have done this at five tables whilst I have watched them and are about a thousand pounds to the good. Come along now, we shall certainly see it tried again.'

As Monsieur Blanchard said, we were just in time to see the little comedy repeated once more at a table some distance away. An attendant was at once sent to request each man to follow him into the office. Here he confronted the two accomplices. Of course they insisted that they did not know each other. Nevertheless, their cards were taken away

and both were conducted to the frontier. They had not done so badly, however.

I tell this little anecdote to show how daily, constantly, the 'surveillance' must watch in order to prevent trickery.

Then one morning I was informed that there was something very queer going on when Orsini was spinning the wheel. What it was Monsieur Blanchard could not say. Orsini was a trusted employee, and, although he was strange in his ways and inclined to solitary habits, his conduct had always been exemplary. Now for some days several roulette tables had been losing so heavily and so regularly that the chef de partie had reported it, because this happened only when the croupier Orsini was spinning. Nearly half a million francs had been paid to one man alone, a tall, lean American whose card bore the name of G. Marlow. But he was not the only one who was winning large sums. It was quite possible that this was merely due to luck, for gamblers are so superstitious that many will play at only one table; and others again only when a certain croupier, who they imagine is lucky to them, is present. However, I was instructed to investigate.

It was the fashionable hour, after dinner, when I saw the American, Marlow, saunter into the room. His lean, hatchet face was cold and disdainful and his grey eyes flickered with contempt from table to table. For a while he watched the excited, absorbed players, sitting round the green baize, stake their money. I saw him look long and searchingly at Orsini, who had just changed over from another part



of the room. The croupier did not appear to be in the least aware of his scrutiny, but, with his usual absent-minded expression began his duties, drawling out the stereotyped 'Faites vos jeux.' Suddenly I saw the American lean forward and throw a bundle of thousand-franc notes on red, uneven, and passé. Four came up and he lost. Again I observed that he looked steadily, almost angrily at the croupier, then he staked the maximum on the same hazards. Luck was with him now and in a short time he had won a large sum. Others, seeing him win so regularly, staked with him. Then, when Orsini was relieved, the American gathered up his winnings and left. So far there had been nothing in the least irregular. Several people had won large sums, well — that happened every day; but would they continue to win?

To my surprise they did. Again the next evening Marlow began at once staking the maximum when Orsini arrived, and his example was soon followed by the same people who had imitated him the night before. At the end of three days I carried my report to Monsieur Blanchard. I found him sitting at the Café de Paris. He was looking very worried and his usual cheery smile was for once missing.

'Well,' he queried, 'have you anything to say worth listening to? I doubt it, for your colleagues say that they have nothing to report. Nothing irregular has been noticed.'

'No, nothing irregular,' I replied, 'but I have seen some strange, very strange coincidences.'

At this my chief looked startled — he guessed that my words held a deeper meaning. For a mo-

ment he searched my face, then without a word he paid for his drink and rising passed his arm through mine and led me away. We crossed to his office under the little covered arcade by the main entrance. Still without speaking he pushed a comfortable chair forward and motioned me to sit. Then, when he had cut and lighted a cigar, he turned to me.

‘Now, mon cher, I hope you are not going to disappoint me; tell me what you mean.’

‘Well, first,’ I answered, pulling out my notebook, ‘here is a list of the people who always play when Orsini spins. One is a charming little Italian girl named Gina Maiolani, she is from Venice. I noticed her because she is so pretty’ — my chief nodded sympathetically; ‘then there are two Englishmen and two Italians, and last but not least that American, Marlow. He always begins in the evening and the others follow his lead. But in the daytime the little girl often plays alone; sometimes, however, she is joined by the two Italians. They never speak to each other in the rooms, although it would be quite natural if they did. But they know each other.’

Monsieur Blanchard leaned forward. ‘How do you know?’

‘I have seen them at Mentone together.’

‘Well, even that doesn’t tell us why they win.’

‘No,’ I said, ‘but if you will come with me tomorrow I will tell you before they stake their money where they are going to place it.’

Monsieur Blanchard looked angry.

‘If you know so much, then you had better tell me at once what the game is.’

I shook my head. 'I cannot yet, for I am not sure; that is why I would like to test it in your presence.'

'Bien,' he answered curtly. 'But I think it is sheer nonsense, for you are suggesting that the wheel can be controlled; and that you know is impossible.'

The next afternoon Monsieur Blanchard met me in the Atrium. Together we entered and strolled from table to table. Suddenly I stopped — I had seen the girl, Gina Maiolani, come in. She went rapidly around the room and then approached the centre table where Orsini had just sat down. For a few moments she played merely for small stakes, but I saw that she held a bundle of large notes in readiness. When I saw her lean forward, I said to Monsieur Blanchard, 'Now she will stake on red and even.' At the same moment the girl placed the maximum on red, and, handing some notes to a croupier, requested him to place them on 'even' on the other side of the board. Six times I gave the right information in advance of her movements. Then my chief pulled me away.

'How is it done?' he asked fiercely when we were outside.

'When Orsini closes his right hand, leaving no fingers showing and scratches his nose with his left hand, it is black and even; when thumb and index are stretched out, it is uneven ——'

Monsieur Blanchard seized me roughly.

'Rubbish! How can Orsini know in advance where the ball will roll? Is that all you have to tell me? Mais c'est impossible!'

‘Nevertheless he does know; test it again to-night,’ I replied.

That evening Marlow gambled heavily. In nearly every case the series of apparently innocent gestures, such as any man might make unconsciously, informed us in advance of the compartment in which the ball would come to rest. Only twice did it fail. Monsieur Blanchard was forced to admit that the impossible had happened.

After the rooms were closed that night, the wheels were examined by experts. All were perfect. They then decided to change the little slips of metal forming the divisions between the numbers.

The Monte Carlo roulette wheels are the finest in the world, made by a specialist, and they are as true as human ingenuity and skill can make them. However, the dividing slips might just conceivably alter the poise the tiniest fraction. It was not only the fact that the bank was being cheated which troubled the administrators: the reputation for absolute fairness of the Casino games was at stake, for of course Orsini’s skill was a double-edged knife. Chance only must rule the tables. The opinion of the Casino expert was that it was only the uncanny skill of the croupier which brought about such surprising results. The wheels had not been tampered with.

‘This man is one in a million,’ he said. ‘Oh, but he must have practised and practised and practised. He has hands so sensitive ——’ and an eloquent gesture concluded the sentence. ‘Now if to-morrow his confederates lose, we shall know for certain that

the feel of the wheel, to which he is accustomed, has altered.'

Anxiously enough we waited for the appearance of the American. The afternoon had worn away without any of the others coming to the tables. Probably they desired to avoid attracting attention. At about ten Marlow came in. With his usual air of cold detachment he stopped to watch the people before commencing to play. Then abruptly he threw down the full limit on all the hazards of four. For a second Orsini had placed his right hand, four fingers extended on the board. Nineteen — the number next to four — came up, and the huge pile of money was raked in except for one small stake. Again and again this happened, and we saw a dull flush slowly creep to the cheeks of the croupier. The American's eyes had a hard glitter and we could see the veins on his forehead swelling with anger; otherwise he gave no sign.

'A dangerous man, that one,' said my chief as we walked away. 'Well — you were right, and we have learned something; it is a valuable lesson. Orsini goes off duty at midnight. We will enter his lodging soon after he has gone home and see what is happening. There will be trouble, I'm afraid, when that thin American goes there.'

'What shall you do?' I asked curiously.

'What can we do? There is no law to punish Orsini — even could we prove anything — and we cannot. A judge would laugh at us. His services will no longer be required — he shall be pensioned off; as a man I can sympathise with the poor devil.



Think of the patient years of practice. It must have taken ten, twelve years — perhaps even more to arrive at such perfection. He is mad. Of course the others will no longer be allowed to enter the rooms. I am even grateful to Giulio Orsini, for now the wheels will be changed over every night to prevent such a thing from happening again. But what a temptation ——' And my chief sighed.

'There are other Casinos,' I suggested.

'Mais oui — and he may try elsewhere. Let them look to it.'

At one in the morning we climbed the staircase to the Italian's lodging in the Condamine. A buzz of angry conversation reached us where we stood outside his door. Then suddenly a harsh, sneering voice said loudly in English:

'Giulio, you're a fake — you can't do a thing — what do you say, boys? We keep what little we've won and if the Dago there opens that fool mouth of his, we'll shut it for good.'

Several people replied indistinctly; then came a clear woman's voice speaking Italian, that of the pretty girl Maiolani, with the Madonna face.

'No, no, my Giulio is no cheat. All his life he has worked — always, always; never does he sleep. He has cheated no one — not even the Cercle. They take your money if you lose and laugh. They say, "Win if you can." My Giulio can; he has proved it.'

Monsieur Blanchard looked at me and whispered:

'You see — that is his point of view.'

Then he knocked loudly on the door, and cried, 'Ouvrez au nom de la loi' ('Open in the name of the

law'). Without waiting, he turned the handle — the door was not locked — and we entered; leaving two of our men on guard outside.

In the centre of the room we saw a large table fitted with a roulette wheel identical to those in use at the Casino. Around this table some ten people were sitting. Several women were amongst them. At our entrance the girl Gina sprang up and ran to Orsini, throwing her arms about him with a sweet, protective gesture. The American, Marlow, half-rose, and his right hand sought a hip pocket.

'Do not draw a weapon, monsieur,' Blanchard said gravely. 'Until now you have done nothing the law can punish you for, but if you do not instantly withdraw your hand — empty — I will have you arrested.'

Reluctantly the man sat down and placed his hands on the table.

'Now,' my chief continued, 'the signorina stated a moment ago quite truly that we throw down the gauntlet to all, and you, like so many others, have accepted the challenge. But we do not approve of your methods and must therefore request you to leave the Principality to-morrow. You will take the first train to wherever you like; otherwise my men outside will conduct you to the frontier. You will also all give me your admission cards now, and leave this house at once. All but the young lady,' he added as an afterthought; 'I wish to speak with Monsieur Orsini in private.'

Crestfallen and cowed, the men and women filed out, handing their cards to one of the officers with

us. At the door the American turned, white with rage.

‘I’m Gene Marlow, mister French policeman, and don’t forget it. I’ll be even with you some day.’

My chief shrugged his shoulders and smiled. ‘There are others, cher monsieur, who have said the same thing; what does one more or less matter?’

When all had gone, Monsieur Blanchard shut the door and sat down.

‘Now, Orsini,’ he began, ‘you’ve been with the administration fifteen years. Why did you do this mad thing?’

In a torrent of speech the Italian told us his story.

His father had been an engraver, a great artist — all his family were artists. His uncle was a famous violinist. Once when as a boy he had admired the soft white hands of the musician, his uncle had said with a sigh, ‘Si, si — the hands; with practice they can do anything.’ These words came back to him, when, with the death of his father, he gave up the engraver’s art, learned from him, and entered the Casino. Always he had believed that hands like his own — long, supple, and sensitive — could develop a superhuman sense of touch.

‘I could have become a great surgeon, but I had no money for study, and my mother was old and ill and needed sunshine, so I came to Monte Carlo and became a croupier.’

The first year at the roulette wheel had given him the idea which now dominated him. He had obtained an exact replica of the wheels used in the Casino and practised every minute of his spare time when not on

duty. Success had been long in coming; always the little lozenge-shaped obstacles on the rim upset his calculations. But little by little he overcame even this difficulty — until now, nearly always, he could so gauge the force exerted by his fingers that the ball would roll into the section he wished.

Blanchard was still incredulous, and there and then Orsini gave us a demonstration of his skill. He refused, however, to admit that what he had done was unfair. Upon this point his mind appeared warped. Again and again he insisted that it was perfectly fair. Had he not worked so hard, so hard, to arrive at perfection? Seeing all arguments useless, Monsieur Blanchard rose.

‘Of course,’ he said, ‘you realise that you can no longer be an employee of the Casino; although we proved to you to-day that even your skill is unavailing, for the wheels can now be changed. However, we cannot allow anything but pure chance to reign in the “rooms.” The administration will give you a pension in return for your many years’ service, and you are free to remain in the country so long as you promise not to attempt to corrupt anyone else. Luckily such hands and such patience as yours are very rare.’

We left the man and the girl, who we learned was his affianced, and returned to Monsieur Blanchard’s office.

The syndicate of crooks who had backed Orsini — for such, we were informed, it truly was, with Marlow at their head — all left the town in the morning. After a stormy interview with the directors, Orsini

and the girl also disappeared. We heard nothing further from them and believed that they had gone abroad. We were informed later that the Italian had attempted to obtain a post as croupier at San Remo; but the fact that he had suddenly left Monte Carlo appeared suspicious and they decided not to employ him.

Then suddenly one day an English lady named Edith Collins was found dead in her room at a well-known hotel. She had shot herself, and the little toy revolver which she had used was lying beside her on the bed.

Suicides are now no longer common in Monte Carlo, but at this time they occurred now and then. The investigation proved her to have been seen often at the Casino and she was entered in the register as one who came regularly. Strangely enough she had not renewed her card of admission, which had expired two weeks before her death. Losses at the tables could not, therefore, have been the cause of her tragic end, except perhaps indirectly. Through her bank we discovered that she was married and that the husband lived in Paris. We communicated with him at once, but received no reply. Instead the man himself arrived on the day following the suicide. He must have started, therefore, before receiving our communication. I was in the office when he was shown in. I saw that something even more terrible than the tragedy must have occurred, which caused him to stammer with rage.

‘I allowed my wife to come here, because she enjoyed a little fling at the tables, and because she was



always reasonable,' he shouted. 'Now it appears that "tripots"' — clandestine gambling-rooms — 'exist here also; and your own croupiers own them — read this!' With a furious gesture he flung a letter on the table. It had been written by the unhappy woman and was in English. My chief handed it to me. I read it through slowly and then translated the contents. It told us that a man calling himself Ricardo had approached the lady one day when she was losing, and suggested that she would do well to come to a private club, just opened, where the chances of winning were very much greater than elsewhere, since the zero, which rakes in all the money on the board, did not exist at their table except as an ordinary number. She had allowed herself to be tempted, and the first evening won a large sum. Encouraged by this she had continued to go there, but ever after she had lost heavily, until she was in such straits that she sold all her jewels and even forged her husband's signature to a large cheque. Then in despair she had killed herself. The address of the place was given and the description of the chief croupier left no doubt as to his identity. It was Orsini — fallen, after his dismissal, to trickery and cheating. We were certain that Gene Marlow was behind this scheme. The place was surrounded and raided, but no one found on the premises. The news of the suicide of one of their victims had probably frightened them.

A very strict watch was now kept, but the next attack against the Casino came in quite a different form.

I had often thought what unique opportunities large gambling-rooms offered to counterfeiters, who could, before the bills were examined and found to be forgeries, change a large number at the tables with impunity. Others had evidently thought of this too, for, unexpectedly one day, several bundles of thousand-franc notes were returned from the bank and handed to the Sûreté. These were so perfectly imitated that only an expert could see the difference between the genuine and the forgeries. It was impossible for the busy croupiers to examine all the bank-notes they received, but every player handling such large notes was carefully watched. Thus by the elimination of the people quite above suspicion we arrived at three, two men and a woman. Even then it was quite possible that these people had actually received some of the forged notes from the croupiers, in the constant exchange of winnings and losses. But luck favoured us here, for late one evening a girl was ushered into the office under the stairs. It was the pretty Venetian, Gina Maiolani, although I hardly recognised her. Pale and thin, with eyes swollen with weeping, she was but a wraith of the winsome girl we had seen clinging desperately to the croupier.

With tears filling her eyes she sobbed out her pitiful story. Orsini had become the helpless tool of Gene Marlow. Completely subjugated by the strong personality of the American, he had not hesitated to stoop to crime. When the attempt made to fleece credulous gamblers had failed, because of the unexpected suicide of Edith Collins, they had all fled to Marseilles. Gina had accompanied her lover in the

hope of tearing him from the grip of the cruel adventurer, Marlow. In Marseilles, the wonderful talent of Orsini, who had been an engraver until he entered the Casino, had suggested the scheme of the counterfeit notes, to be passed in the gambling-rooms, to the American. Orsini, who since the crumbling of his dreams appeared to become daily more bitter and evil, acquiesced eagerly, and in a short time a series of perfect plates were produced by his skilful fingers. The American had taken a house near the harbour and here they printed a quantity of thousand-franc notes. Marlow, who appeared to know all the criminals of the old maritime capital, sent several men, well dressed and polished of bearing, to the Casinos at Monte Carlo and at Aix-les-Bains. All this, the girl said, she would have borne cheerfully for the sake of being with the man she loved. But worse was in store for her. A Viennese woman named Gerty Altin, who danced at one of the music halls, the Alcazar, was enlisted in the band. The American had become infatuated with her blue eyes and dimpled, baby face. But the girl preferred Orsini, and, to the despair of Gina, Orsini had also become enamoured of this Gerty Altin. When Gina had reproached him with his unfaithfulness, she was sent away. Now she wanted her revenge — not on Giulio Orsini, for she still loved him, but on the woman and the American, the cause of all their troubles. ‘Oh, that dreadful, sneering Gene Marlow,’ she cried passionately, ‘how I hate him! He is not human that man — no. Always he has with him a huge black cat — I believe it is his familiar. Madonna — he is a fiend!’

The next afternoon we arrived at Marseilles. Monsieur Blanchard had brought the Venetian with him, for in return for her valuable information she had requested to be present when her rival was arrested.

The Marseilles police coöperated with us, and the house was at once surrounded. Orsini and Gerty Altin, were caught outside the door as they were returning from a restaurant. When we went upstairs we found Gene Marlow sitting in an arm-chair with a large black cat on his knees. He looked up with an acid smile at my chief.

‘Ah, the Monte Carlo policeman again, eh? Well, I said you’d hear from me and so you did. But you’ll never send me to jail.’ Before we could stop him, he had placed a pistol to his head and pulled the trigger.

Thanks to carefully kept account-books in which the names of the confederates were entered, we were able to capture them all. The plates which Orsini had made are now, I believe, in the private collection of the Banque de France.

The Italian was sentenced to fifteen years’ imprisonment and died two years later in the prison at Grasse.

Since then Dame Roulette has remained the symbol of pure chance, defying all who attempt to harness her capricious nature to a system; but she is a snob, for she willingly gives to the rich and frowns on the poor and needy. Monsieur Blanchard once said whimsically:

‘We French say “*La roulette*,” because we recognised long ago that her soul is feminine, and you know well that a woman does not love failures.’

EPISODE III  
LATOUCHE, THE APACHE  
A STORY OF THE PARIS UNDERWORLD





## EPISODE III

### LATOUCHE, THE APACHE

#### A STORY OF THE PARIS UNDERWORLD

EVERY nation has its own peculiar type of criminal, and he is without doubt the materialisation of its faults and vices and the true expression of what that nation would be were it suddenly deprived of conscience and restraint. He is a distorted image of the people; like a reflection in a curved mirror, the individual features are all there and clearly recognisable, but the whole is grotesque and ugly. Thus the Parisian criminal is a type apart, the product of that great city and the child of its sins.

Vain, pleasure-loving, heartless, sordid, callous, cruel, and sentimental, he can be brave to excess or cringingly cowardly. This startling string of adjectives is needed to paint the apache, knight of the lesser boulevards and treasured possession of the Frivolous Capital. No other city breeds him. Marseilles had its Nervi, Berlin its Verbrecher, London — well, London has really no typical criminal: Bill Sikes is of the past and the modern crook just a professional law-breaker. Perhaps New York and Chicago run Paris very close; yet nowhere but in Paris can one find just that type — the beast who loves crime for its own sake and who has a language, a dress, and a tradition all his own.

So many stories have been written about the

apache! The name was given to him by the press, and seized upon by the public as aptly expressing the ferocity of his kind, akin to that of the redskin of pioneer days. But most of the stories, and also the films that deal with him prove that the writer knew nothing whatever about the psychology of the Parisian bandit. Very few Englishmen ever lose their accent sufficiently to be able to seek him in his haunts. Fewer still ever learn to speak his peculiar 'argot.' When they do by chance arrive at this stage, they have already become so accustomed to the daily menu of tragedies printed in the Paris papers that they cease to trouble about them. It is only because my profession brought me continually in contact with these savage outlaws that little by little I began to sense something of their mentality. Forced as I was to make a close study of their life, their dress, and their language, in order to be able to approach them as one of themselves, I began to understand their point of view. Many of them, like the motor bandits, were well educated. I remember one day, when visiting the headquarters of the anarchists from whose ranks sprang such desperate men as Garnier and Valet, I was surprised to find several of the tribe reading poetry. Yet these men had killed more than twelve people with cold, calculating ferocity and had held a regiment of police and soldiers at bay for a whole day, until dynamite put an end to their career.

Of all these monsters, however, Latouche — nicknamed l'Aristo (the gentleman) — was the worst. Young, handsome, and of good family, he had begun

life as a medical student. A woman and a scandal forced him to leave Paris for a time. He went to Egypt and for a period was engaged in smuggling opium into France. For this he was sentenced to a long term of imprisonment. He managed to escape, and, posing as a Belgian, joined the Foreign Legion. He served in Africa and in the East and survived, but, like most of those who have passed through that inferno, he returned a devil incarnate. Yet, when first he was pointed out to me, I could hardly believe that the tales I had heard of him were true.

Latouche was short and slim, with small feet and hands. His features were regular and pleasing, and his tiny black moustache and small pointed chin gave him the appearance of a modest employee, bank clerk, or accountant. Only the eyes struck a jarring discord, and their regard always produced in me that sudden tightening of the spinal nerves which the unexpected appearance of a deadly reptile causes. They were small, black, set obliquely, and close together; but the horrible thing about them was their utter lack of expression, as though a membrane covered them. Instinctively one divined the loathsome mind behind their unseeing gaze. Somewhere, I feel sure, there was a strain of the Mongol in Latouche, and this the colour and texture of his skin proclaimed also. Tartar or Hun — the hereditary influence of a yellow forbear was unmistakeable.

Perhaps I am peculiarly sensitive to the human aura, that intangible something emanating from everyone, and which I believe is merely the vibration of their thoughts and personality reacting on

the subconscious mind. Often I have noticed that certain men, when first I encounter them, paint themselves on my imagination in a form which has nothing in common with their appearance. Thus the picture evoked when I looked at Latouche was that of a lank-haired, yellow-robed savage, slaying, burning, and destroying with glee, while in my ears sounded the shrieks and groans of his victims. That he did not produce this impression on everyone I know, for many were the women who loved him, to their cost; and the last of these was that unhappy young French-Canadian, Enid Hardy, who paid for her folly with her life.

It was at the time that Monsieur Lepine, the energetic and aggressive little Prefect of Police, had decided that his army of policemen should be taught Japanese wrestling and jiu-jitsu, and had chosen as teachers the two exponents of that science, Osaka and Itaku, that we first heard of a new power among the apaches and anarchists whose 'club' was at Romainville, in the house where their paper, 'l'Anarchie,' was edited and printed.

The neighbours, whose windows overlooked the garden at the back of this house, informed the police several times that a shooting-gallery and a gymnasium had been installed there. One day Monsieur Dufresne, the Chief of the Paris Sûreté, called me into his office and said with a grin: 'Les apaches are in favour of a proper methodical apprenticeship, I hear. Soon they will insist that a new member to the brotherhood shall pass an examination before being



admitted. We are hopelessly old-fashioned, I am afraid. But perhaps it is not too late to learn. This will amuse you; go and see what it is all about.' And he threw a letter across to me.

'Monsieur,' it began, coldly and formally, 'whilst the police sleep or spend their leisure hours playing cards, the assassins, robbers, and footpads ply their fearful trade with impunity. They train themselves assiduously like any honest athlete — and that too under our very noses. They laugh at you and the anachronisms who call themselves members of the Sûreté. In the last few days, we, the undersigned, citizens of our glorious Republic, have been able to watch and learn — *mais oui, monsieur*, to learn even — how to handle the "surin" so that the blade instantly reaches the vitals; to throw the scarf around a victim's neck and choke him, "*le coup du père François*"; and many other apache methods of robbing and slaying the hard-working bourgeois. Monsieur, you would have pleasure to see a bandit dressed as a policeman attacked and overcome. It is a school for crime, monsieur — but yes — under our windows. I do not suppose for a moment that this interests you, but should it do so — those windows are at your disposal!'

Then came a number of signatures and the address.

I expressed my astonishment at this extraordinary letter.

'Go and see,' said Monsieur Dufresne. 'I do not suppose it is more than just a little apache fun, but we may as well know.'

I looked at the address and saw that the letter had come from the Rue de la Barre at Romainville.

When I arrived there, I was received by a little weazened old man, who conducted me with a great show of mystery to a back room on the second floor of his house. Looking out of the window, I saw that the garden of the notorious headquarters of 'l'Anarchie' was below me; I had arrived at an hour when training was in full swing. Near the house several men were standing and kneeling, firing with revolvers at a target which slowly moved along the distant wall by means of a tackle of ropes and pulleys. This target was composed of an old policeman's tunic and cap, stuffed with straw; the face was a white cloth, on which eyes, nose, and mouth had been fantastically painted. It appeared childish enough, but I soon saw that the revolver practice was no joke. Hardly a shot was fired which did not cause the effigy to swing and jump. What made this scene more significant was that on the blue tunic the heart, lungs, and stomach had been drawn in white, by one who was skilled in anatomy. Standing beside the marksman was a slim young fellow, who gave his orders in a harsh nasal voice. It was my first sight of Latouche, whose head I was later to see under the deadly blade of Madame Guillotine. 'Lungs,' I heard him say — and a shot cracked. 'Heart' — and another man fired.

'Eh bien?' said the old man beside me; 'a pleasant sport, is it not? Soon they will practise other pretty ways, attendez toujours.' After an hour of this pistol practice, I saw Latouche sit down and take off his

clothes, retaining only vest, shorts, and his shoes. There was a square lawn in the centre of the garden and on this Latouche now took up his position. At a call two men came out wearing blue jerseys on which had been chalked the word 'Flic.'<sup>1</sup> They immediately attacked the apache and attempted to throw him down. Instead they were themselves tripped and hurled to the ground. In an instant both were gasping and helpless, and I was astounded to see that Latouche was a master of jiu-jitsu; I did not then know of his sojourn in the East. For another hour he demonstrated grips, parries, and counter-attacks to the men surrounding him. Even then I noted how tireless Latouche was. Following upon the wrestling lesson, there came a series of significant scenes during which one man played the part of an inoffensive pedestrian, and was waylaid and robbed of various objects such as his watch, pocket-book, and money. I knew of that deadly attack of the 'père François,' so called because he invented it, but I had never seen it so callously demonstrated. Whilst the fellow who played the victim walked slowly about the garden, a man came up and entered into conversation with him. Another approached noiselessly from behind and threw a scarf over his head, instantly whirling and pulling it with his two hands over his left shoulder, so that the other was lifted from the ground and remained hanging by the scarf around his neck. Then, when he was thus helpless and strangling, the confederate calmly went through his pockets. I had seen enough and, thank-

<sup>1</sup> Argot for policeman.

ing my guide, who appeared sincerely horrified at this cynical exhibition, I returned to make my report to my chief.

At first he was inclined to treat the matter as a joke, then, when I insisted on the evident earnestness with which the apaches went about their preparations for robbery and murder, he called in Monsieur Colbert, one of his most trusted inspectors. To him he related what I had seen.

To my satisfaction Colbert did not laugh as I had expected he would; on the contrary, he took a serious view of the whole proceedings. After walking up and down the room for some minutes puffing at his pipe, which even in the presence of his superiors was always between his lips, although not alight, he asked for permission to go and find out what was known about the house in Romainville.

Half an hour elapsed before he returned with several documents. These he gave to Monsieur Dufresne, saying:

‘Until now nothing very serious has been reported about these anarchists. Their leader was that crazy fellow Libertad, who was killed in a street fight. Since his death a man named Lorulot is editing the rag called “l’Anarchie.” They preach and rave against capitalists and read Tolstoi and Ibsen. Every Monday they have what they call a “cause-rie” — a kind of open meeting when the platform can be taken by anyone. No serious crime has been committed by any of those who live in that house, but they have all been to prison more or less, for small offences.’

Turning to me, he added, 'To-day is Monday, if Monsieur Dufresne wishes we can go to the meeting to-night and see who is there.'

To this Monsieur Dufresne agreed.

At eight o'clock we arrived at the house. Around the entrance we saw a strange mixture of workmen, employees, and ruffians. We had taken the precaution of dressing ourselves in rough clothes, for we did not wish to attract attention. The meeting was the usual kind of thing. The theories then in vogue, chiefly those of Russian social reformers such as Tolstoi and Gorky and the teachings of Nietzsche were discussed more or less lucidly. We began to think that we had wasted our time, when suddenly there was a commotion, and the man I had seen in the afternoon — Latouche — stepped onto the little platform of rough boards. A murmur of approval swept round the room, as he began talking. His voice was harsh and unpleasant. In short, biting sentences Latouche jeered at the various speakers who had preceded him.

'Whilst you talk of reforming the community,' he concluded, 'the capitalists and slave-drivers are laughing at you. You fools! It is not with fine words and theories that you can fight them, but with deeds. War — war with knife and pistol, that is the solution. Dynamite and pestilence they will fear and understand, but never our plea for fair treatment and justice. As they train their hired assassins, the police, to fight us, so must we unite and train ourselves. Already we have begun. Soon they shall be taught that we have the right to live as well



as they.' And the speaker drew and brandished a pistol.

For a moment the listeners remained motionless, so unexpected had been the outburst. Then all were on their feet talking excitedly. The more peaceful at once withdrew, but a dozen villainous-looking men surrounded Latouche — clapping him on the back and shouting encouragement. We had heard enough for our purpose and left also.

When we were outside, I told Colbert that the last speaker was the man whom I had seen in the garden.

'Yes, I thought as much,' said my colleague. 'I will look up the records to-night, and see what is known about him. We must act at once. The place shall be closed. A madman like that can cause immense harm.'

The next day Colbert came to me and said:

'The man who spoke so violently last night is not Lorulot, for he is at present on a holiday at the expense of the State. This fellow seems to have taken charge of the anarchist colony at Romainville, during his absence. Monsieur Dufresne has decided not to raid the place nor to arrest anyone yet, for he thinks that by waiting we may make a large haul. There are probably some dangerous criminals hiding in that house. The fellow we saw resembles an escaped convict called René Latouche, who has been wanted for several years, but until now we had no idea where he was hiding. You are not known to them, so perhaps you will go along and try to get into conversation with him. Here is the "fiche" of Latouche. I have posted several men within call and

I shall be driving up and down in an old cab with the Brigadier Rousseau on the box.'

During the day I strolled along to the Rue de la Barre dressed as a mechanic. I had a patch over one eye and my left hand was bound up as though I had met with an accident. The 'bistro' at the little café opposite the house which we visited the night before was quite friendly, but could tell me little except that since Lorulot had gone a number of men, never seen before, came daily to the house. It was a difficult matter to gain admission there without arousing suspicion, and for a day I could do nothing but watch from the café. Finally I decided to leave foolish disguises aside and go the next day openly as a reporter. This I did. The door was opened by a girl who was later to become notorious, when the motor bandits were captured, for they had all sought shelter there — her name was Rirette Maîtrejean. I explained that I had heard about the shooting-gallery and the curious training going on in the garden from neighbours, and wished to investigate in order to write about it. She told me that the men who were responsible for this had taken advantage of the hospitality given to every anarchist, to enter and virtually take possession; threatening to shoot any who interfered. But something had frightened them away the day before and they had all gone and taken their belongings with them. This we found was true, for, following upon my report, Colbert and several of his men entered and searched the place. The modern Fagin and his pupils were no longer there. The description we managed to obtain from people who had

seen the leader confirmed our belief that he was the escaped convict Latouche. A watch was kept upon all the likely haunts, of course, but he was not seen in any of them. Yet soon we heard strange tales of the fellow's activities. A well-known apache was carried to the Lariboisière hospital one night, severely wounded. The fellow was nicknamed 'Bel-Ami,' because, like his namesake in the famous book by Maupassant, he was the adored of all the women of the faubourgs. He related that Latouche and he had fought a duel with knives. His sweetheart — l'Españole, a tall, handsome girl, who had been concerned in the murder of a rich German banker named Weiss, but was acquitted for lack of proof — had left him because Latouche was a better dancer than he, and had taken up her abode with his rival. Both men were leaders of a numerous following of ruffians ready for any deed of violence. The night before, the two gangs had met, and a battle royal was imminent, when Latouche proposed that the leaders only should fight for supremacy, the girl to belong to the victor. They had then gone to a lonely spot on the fortifications and stripped to the waist, while the men formed a ring. Latouche had gained an easy victory because he had changed his knife from the right to the left hand, and Bel-Ami was unable to parry the upward thrust from that side.

'But I will get him yet,' the wounded man snarled, grinning with rage, 'as soon as this little cut has healed. I know where he has his secret retreat.' Pressed to say where this was, he refused to answer.

A few days after this characteristic episode, Col-

bert and I were prowling about 'La Villette' when we heard a cry for help. Running to the spot from where the call had come, we found a man lying on the ground with a silk handkerchief twisted around his neck. Although we carried him at once to a chemist and applied artificial respiration, he died without regaining consciousness.

The man, thus killed only a short distance from busy, teeming streets, was a prosperous wholesale provision dealer named Jacques Dubois. Our enquiry brought to light the fact that he had lately dined several times in the company of a tall, handsome girl in whom we recognised that new acquisition of Latouche, the former sweetheart of Bel-Ami. Obviously the apache was using her as a decoy. What surprised and angered us was the ease with which he and his gang disappeared. Although it was not really my work, I spent the week with Rousseau and Colbert, searching every likely café and shady dance-hall. It was late one night when, near the Seine embankment, I saw a group of Salvation Army men and women going their usual rounds of the districts where poor and homeless creatures sought shelter. They were pushing a handcart, on which was a huge cauldron of steaming soup which they were in the habit of distributing every night. It is rare, even in the Paris slums, that these devoted, unselfish people meet with rudeness. As I approached, I saw, however, that a crowd of hooligans were making sport of them. Suddenly a lithe form, dressed in peg-top trousers and jersey and wearing rope-soled espadrilles, bounded from a doorway. Like a storm

he burst upon the startled roughs; I heard the impact of terrific blows and several of them reeled and fell. Using feet and hands, the latter probably armed with knuckle-dusters, this queer knight-errant made such fearful havoc of his adversaries that they fled without attempting to retaliate. Then I saw him sweep off his cap in an exaggerated bow to the frightened soup-distributors. As he did so the light from a street lamp fell on his face — it was Latouche! It went against the grain that I should take advantage of his singular bravery, so I waited until the little band of blue-clad men and lassies had continued on their errand of mercy, before going up to him. He was leaning against the low parapet, rolling a cigarette, when I approached. Pulling a Maryland from my pocket, I asked him for a light. It was then for the first time that I felt the horror of his filmy eyes. I saw that he was looking fixedly at my hand as I lit my cigarette from his match. When it was glowing, he smiled an evil smile and said, pointing to my dress, 'T'as du boulot?' (Are you working?)

I shook my head. 'No — been out of work for some time.'

'Well, "patte blanche," I advise you to remain out of work.' And he laughed harshly.

I felt myself grow red with humiliation. I had forgotten to dirty my nails. 'Ah bah,' I retorted, 'les gonzesses don't like dirty hands, and women are better than work any day.'

For a moment he did not reply; then he said meaningly, 'Better not try to dirty them then.'

I could see that the fellow was watching my every



movement and I guessed that he was well armed; still I could not let him go, for I remembered all the men this strange being had killed or caused to be killed. Abruptly he turned as if to walk away and I pulled out my whistle. Before it reached my lips, a huge black paw flashed over my shoulder and it was wrenched away. At the same instant I was picked up as though I weighed nothing and flung over the low wall into the swirling river. I had a fleeting impression of a face like that of a gorilla peering after me; then I had to struggle against the swift current.

When I rejoined Colbert, dripping wet and sick with rage at my fiasco, I could only relate how easily I had been rendered helpless. Colbert was grave and sympathetic.

'You are lucky to be alive,' he said. 'I have heard of the negro who threw you into the river. He is called "Cric-Crac," because he can break a man's back just like that — cric-crac.' I shuddered.

'He is from the Senegal,' my friend continued, 'and was one of the most bloodthirsty members of the band of which Bel-Ami was leader. I can understand your "sporting instinct" in not covering and taking the bandit when he was protecting those Salvation Army people — but it was a chance which will not come again.'

The meeting with me had apparently put the apache on his guard, for now we sought him in vain.

Then came the startling news that the pretty heiress and society girl, Enid Hardy, had mysteriously disappeared. She was a Canadian, whose father had been a rich lumberman and who had left his wealth

to his charming daughter. Obedient to the call of her French blood, for the mother had originally come from Normandy, Enid Hardy had settled down in Paris, where for a season she had dazzled society by her sumptuous receptions. The thirst for excitement had led her to frequent the Latin Quarter and bohemian Montmartre, where she often danced in the various 'bals' with doubtful partners.

Then one night she had not returned home. The investigation brought to light the astounding fact that, while the Sûreté had been searching for him in low apache haunts, Latouche — thanks to his early education — had been spending his time, fashionably dressed, dancing the then popular tango in expensive Montmartre restaurants, at the Tabarin, and other pleasure resorts. Enid Hardy had evidently fallen in love with the bandit, for, on the day she was last seen, she had drawn a large sum from the bank and, after supping in his company at the Abbaye Thélême, had danced half the night with him. Since then neither had reappeared. It was feared that the girl had been murdered and robbed of her jewels and money. Yet, again, we could obtain no clue to the hiding-place of the apache and his gang. Then it was I remembered the 'Caveau de Bibi.'

Dr. Bertillon had long decided that the place should be raided and to him I went and explained my idea. I believed that since Latouche was not to be found in any of the usual cafés and thieves' dens, yet was still in Paris, it was because he had discovered an underground retreat. There had been a

long series of crimes committed lately which pointed to unwonted activity among the footpads of the great city. Bank messengers had been waylaid and either killed or wounded, several had completely disappeared, leaving no trace. The cellar tavern, called the 'caveau,' communicated with the vast sewers, and it was quite possible that the men we had seen practising their criminal methods in Romainville had found the underground galleries, with their exits in many streets, the ideal stronghold.

'But there is something more than just this theory which makes you think of the Caveau de Bibi,' Dr. Bertillon said when I had finished my explanation.

'Yes, there is,' I replied. "'The Crédit Foncier"' informed the Sûreté this morning that one of their employees, who had been sent to collect various drafts, has not returned. He was last seen in the Rue de Lappe, near the Bastille, and had then only three more people to call upon. One of these is an Italian named Collodi, who has a "Champignonnière" — that is, an underground mushroom farm.'

My chief nodded. 'I see — well, I will speak to Monsieur Dufresne. I will let you know later what he decides.'

The outcome of my interview was that Colbert, Rousseau, and myself were ordered to investigate the matter. While Rousseau went with a strong force of police to the infamous cellar tavern, Colbert and I went to the house of the Italian Collodi. It had been agreed that after placing our men to guard the upper exits, we should enter the place at the stroke of seven, so that, if the two places com-

municated underground, as I believed, we should catch whoever attempted to escape either way. No answer was obtained to our knocking, so, without more ado, we forced the door and entered. The place was deserted. In the extensive underground vault where the mushroom beds were, we found traces of recent occupation. The huge iron ovens, which are used to maintain an even temperature in these places, were glowing redly and had been filled to the brim with coke. Although we searched the house and the cellar carefully, we found nothing, and Colbert began to think that we were on a false scent. We were about to go when the dog we had taken with us began scratching frantically in one corner of the mushroom vault, whining eagerly. Stooping over the hole he had made, we saw several shining pieces of metal. They proved to be the remains of a steel lock and chain and a buckle, which had been exposed to intense heat, and, although they were partly fused, we still saw on them the monogram of the well-known bank.

‘These belonged to the unfortunate messenger,’ said Colbert, ‘and it is probable that the body has been burned in those ovens. But many others whose remains were never found and whose fate was evidently similar were not killed in this neighbourhood. How were they brought here?’

‘Underground,’ I replied; ‘we must search. Perhaps the dog can find what we cannot.’ But, although we sounded the walls and explored every inch of the ground, all our efforts were in vain. Finally Colbert and I elected to stay in the vault and

watch. The men immediately filed out and when the noise of their footsteps had died away, we settled down, each in a corner, where the glow from the ovens did not reach us. Several hours passed thus in complete silence, until I felt myself gradually falling asleep. I was about to stand up when a harsh laugh sounded from a few yards away. At the same moment one of the ovens moved with a grating sound to one side and a head and shoulders emerged from a black opening in the ground. Small wonder that neither we nor the dog had discovered it, for the heat of the glowing coke had kept us at a distance. With pistol ready, we waited for the man to crawl out. I had recognised him instantly. It was the bandit Latouche. Carefully he looked around, then suddenly he ducked down again and we heard his voice calling to someone. Before we could move the rays of an acetylene lamp illuminated the whole vault brilliantly. Knowing that we were discovered we made a rush for the hole in the ground. Instantly the lamp disappeared and we heard running feet. Colbert was about to switch on his pocket torch, when I seized his arm and pulled him back. Taking off my cap, I placed it on the end of a piece of wood and pushed it slowly over the edge, throwing the rays of my lamp down the opening. Four shots spat out from below and the cap was torn from the stick. For a moment we did not know what to do — the apache and probably some of his companions were waiting for us. Then the sight of the ovens gave us an idea. There were several large shovels lying about. We filled one of them with glowing coke and



suddenly emptied it down the opening. A roar of pain and anger followed and a string of vile curses told us that they had fallen on an upturned face. Without giving the men below time to recover from their surprise, we threw ourselves flat on the edge and switched on our lamps. Below us was a wide tunnel built of square stones. An iron ladder led down to the ground some ten feet away, and on the stones with which it was paved a man was writhing in pain. Forgetting that it might be a ruse, we clambered down the ladder. He had been badly burned on the face and neck by our sudden attack, but the large automatic pistol still beside him told us that our pity was wasted. We handcuffed him and dragged him up into the vault, just as several shots were fired at us from a distance. As we regained the mushroom cellar, we heard a shower of blows on the door above and the voice of Rousseau shouting. Colbert rushed upstairs to let him in, and in a few moments he came back followed by the old Brigadier and four Sûreté officers. Rousseau was very angry.

‘A fine chase we have had, *nom de nom!*’ he growled. ‘One of my men killed and two still lying wounded in the “caveau” and all for nothing. Just the usual gang of ruffians were down there, but no sign of Latouche nor of our friend Bibi the Terror. We caught several — but those sewers are a death-trap. What have you done?’

I pointed to the man we had captured, who was groaning and praying for relief.

‘Bien,’ said Rousseau. ‘We will send for an ambulance.’ Then, looking around him and at the hole

in the ground, he asked what we had discovered. We told him that we had been about to explore when he arrived. As soon as the man had been taken away, we all crept down the ladder again. Holding our electric torches away from our bodies, we slowly examined the stone-paved tunnel.

'This is not part of the sewers,' said Colbert. 'Where the devil are we?'

Suddenly Rousseau gave a cry and flashed his lamp towards a number of long, narrow recesses, almost like sleeping-berths, built into the wall. We started back in horror — in each one was a human skeleton yellow with age, a dry parchment skin still adhering to the skulls.

'The catacombs!' burst from Colbert — 'we are in the catacombs of Paris, where centuries ago the monks placed their dead. What a hiding-place. . . . En avant! — we must ascertain how far this gallery goes. No wonder we have been unable to find Latouche and his gang!'

Silently we crept forward. The tunnel we were in commenced at the iron ladder, which had obviously been placed there recently. On every side were gruesome vestiges of death and decay. Once my lamp shone on a rough cross hewn in the stone with an inscription in Latin under it. After about two hundred yards in a straight line, we came to a round space that had evidently once served as a hall of assembly. Here we found traces of the apaches. Several tables had been carried to this spot. On them were still an array of bottles and dishes, looking weirdly out of place in that ancient hall of re-

ligious fervour. Mattresses were ranged along one side and blankets and clothes strewed the floor. A curtain had been hung before a deep recess, and behind it we found a camp bed and dainty clothes which had belonged to a woman of taste and wealth. A leather bag with silver fittings was lying overturned on the bed: on one side of it were the initials 'E. H.'

'That belonged to the little girl from Canada,' said Rousseau. 'She was either kept a prisoner here or she followed the apache leader of her own free will. The latter, I should think.'

'Why?' asked Colbert. '*C'est fantastique*. A girl like that would not stay here willingly.'

Rousseau pointed to the curtain. 'They would not have put that up if she had been a prisoner — our sweet criminals are not so attentive to a captive woman.'

Several galleries radiated out from the hall, and, after examining the marks in the dust, we decided to separate and follow two of them. Rousseau and two men crept with me along one passage and Colbert went down the other with the remaining two men. The tunnel we had chosen was narrow, with burial niches on each side. The light from our electric torches cast dancing shadows of weird, unearthly shape on these recesses, many of which were filled at haphazard with bones and grinning skulls. Others appeared to have dark, moving forms with gleaming eyes in their depths. A shrill piping revealed their nature; they were rats. Suddenly, as we neared a spot where the passage widened, sinister

faces peered at us from a break in the wall — a whistle shrilled somewhere and at the signal several men leaped out, gleaming knives in their hands. A pistol cracked behind us and the torch Rousseau held was smashed to splinters. We were beset on all sides. What followed was a nightmare. In the dark the flashes from our pistols were blinding in their intensity, and the reports, magnified a hundredfold in that narrow space, split our ears and made us dizzy. Back to back we fought savagely. Fortunately neither the men behind nor those in front dared to use firearms, for fear of shooting each other, or we should have been massacred; even as it was, we were in desperate straits, and should have been overcome in a few minutes if Colbert and his men had not arrived. Now the attackers were in their turn taken by surprise and those between Colbert and ourselves at once surrendered. Leaving him to deal with them, we ran after the men who had appeared before us. Rousseau was wounded in one arm and I had a cut in the neck, but no one was seriously hurt. Guided by the noise of running feet we raced along several galleries. Suddenly a wall rose before us; turning quickly we were just in time to see someone watching from a hole on one side. Rousseau fired and the face disappeared. By the light of our lamps we saw that on the other side of the opening there was running water; we had reached the sewers. We climbed cautiously through the opening and glimpsed several moving shapes in the distance. The chase continued through sewer after sewer for several hours, the fleeing shapes ever

before us. We could advance only in single file, yet we were determined to capture the men who had attacked us. But we had to abandon the pursuit at last, for the wound in Rousseau's arm was becoming very painful. Instead of going back the way we had come, we searched for and were fortunate enough to find one of the iron ladders leading to the street. Dragging and pushing the old Brigadier between us, we managed to climb this and so gained the open air. To our surprise we found ourselves on the outskirts of Paris. Tired, dirty, and footsore, with wounds and cuts throbbing painfully, we dragged ourselves along, supporting Rousseau, who was now in a bad way, until we gained a *poste de police*. A car from the Sûreté was sent for us in reply to our telephone call. It was dawn when I arrived home.

In all seven men had been captured. For some days they refused stubbornly to give any information, but at last one of them gave way under the persistent questions of the juge d'instruction and told him that Latouche had disposed of nearly thirty men. All the bodies of those who had been murdered had been brought through the underground passages to the mushroom cellar and burned there. He had only helped to sell the stolen jewellery, bank drafts, and other ill-gotten spoils, he averred. Pressed to indicate the hiding-place of the leader, he confessed that Latouche possessed a house outside Paris, from which he could gain the sewers and the catacombs, but where it was he did not know. The man who had been burned was still in hospital and could not



be interrogated. He was the Italian Collodi, the owner of the mushroom farm.

Officers were placed in the catacombs and at all the likely exits from the sewers. The caveau was in the hands of the police, and men were constantly on guard there too. Of the unfortunate girl, Enid Hardy, we had no news whatever. Crowds daily surrounded the house of the Italian, morbidly curious to see the place where so many victims had been incinerated.

'The horror of the Champignonnière' the 'Matin' called it. Objects were discovered that had belonged to several well-known men and women, whose mysterious disappearance had been a nine days' wonder: soon the very name of Latouche made people shudder and look fearfully around.

The Sûreté worked feverishly day and night and many more of Latouche's accomplices were captured, but the leader and his lieutenant, the gigantic negro Cric-Crac, were still at large. But where the police failed, hatred and jealousy succeeded. We had almost forgotten Bel-Ami, who had quite recovered from the wound inflicted by Latouche, and was shut in a room by himself pending his removal to prison. One night he managed to escape from the hospital and disappeared, but not for long. Just before dawn, terrible cries were heard proceeding from a lonely house at Bicêtre, a northern suburb of Paris. The police at once surrounded the house, and, in answer to an urgent telephone message informing us that Latouche and the negro had fired at the police from a window, we raced there in a powerful

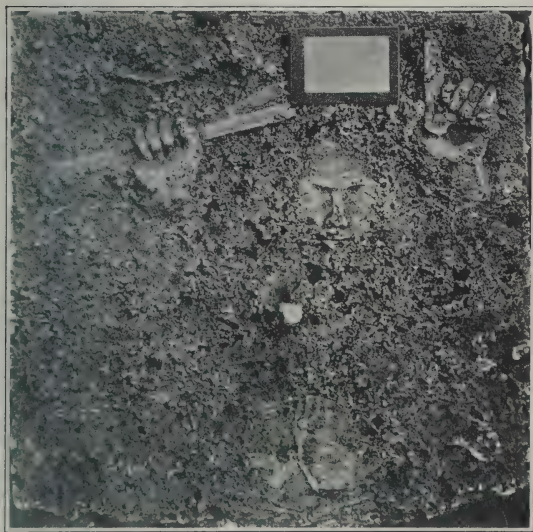
car. Dr. Bertillon and Monsieur Dufresne quickly joined us and a squad of motor-cycle police followed. A cordon was formed round the house, in which a desperate fight was taking place. Just as we arrived, an explosion blew out several windows and a body was hurled from a broken casement. It was Bel-Ami, terribly mangled and bleeding from a dozen wounds. He died as we lifted him. The police were about to smash in the stout door with a wooden beam, when a series of fearful screams turned our blood cold; the door opened and a girl staggered forward blindly, her face and neck dreadfully burned by vitriol. Colbert at once drove her to the nearest hospital in the Sûreté ambulance. Meanwhile the police had rushed into the house. A frantic search for the apache revealed the fact that he had again escaped, but on a bed in a back room we found the poor girl, Enid Hardy, bound and gagged. She was bleeding from a deep knife wound and died before she could be removed. A broken and incoherent statement obtained from her told us only what we already knew — that for a time the unhappy girl had foolishly thought to find romance and excitement in the company of the apache. Too late she had realised what a monster he was, and, when she tried to run away, he had chained her up in an attic. For weeks she had been a prisoner in the room where we found her.

Then that evening, while Latouche, the negro, and a girl called Jeanne l'Espanole were eating, a man had entered the room through the window and had attacked them. From where she lay, she saw



LATOUCHE

First photograph taken after his arrest in the sewers.



PLASTER CAST OF DUST WHERE ONE OF THE  
LATOUCHE GANG FELL

Note prints of jimmy in one hand and automatic in the other, also those of the waistcoat buttons, which led to his capture.



the whole dreadful scene. Taken by surprise, the negro had received a stab in the neck. Then Latouche sprang at the intruder and a fierce struggle had ensued which lasted a long time. At last Latouche had tripped and fallen. Thereupon the other man pulled a small jar from his pocket and was about to throw it at Latouche when the girl Jeanne had rushed between them. With a howl of rage, the man had yelled, 'Take it, then, if you want it!' and hurled the jar, which contained vitriol, at her head. At that moment the negro had succeeded in rising, and lifting the man above his head threw him at the closed window. A terrible explosion followed. She heard the girl stumble downstairs shrieking dreadfully. Then Latouche and the negro had dashed through the room, and, in passing, Latouche had driven a knife into her, shouting, 'You're better dead!'

Too late we attempted to question her as to how the apache escaped; the poor girl had already lost consciousness and died in a few moments.

After her body had been removed, Dr. Bertillon carefully examined the house and grounds, together with Colbert and myself. In the cellar we found splashes of blood which led to a corner, where we discovered a loose stone slab. Under this was another underground passage. Several Sûreté officers were summoned at once and we clambered down. We found ourselves in some old abandoned galleries which had served as sewers in former years. They were swarming with thousands of huge rats and we literally had to fight our way through them. So



ravenous and savage were they that several of our men were cruelly bitten. They surrounded and attacked us the moment we ceased to shout and stamp; running over our feet and dropping on us from above. Long before we reached a larger tunnel leading from the one we had entered, we were sick with loathing and horror. Several times we stumbled against white and shining skeletons; then abruptly from ahead we heard shouting and the reverberation of pistol shots. A struggle was going on at a bend in the tunnel, which ended as we arrived. In the midst of a group of police officers was Latouche, taken at last; on the ground, dead, shot through the heart was the negro.

The bandits remained in prison for over a year pending their trial; for the crimes they had committed were so numerous that three investigating judges were kept busy during that time. When they were finally brought before the court, presided over by the great criminal judge, Monsieur Mangin, the proceedings were constantly interrupted by violent manifestations and cries of 'Why waste time? Throw them to us to deal with.'

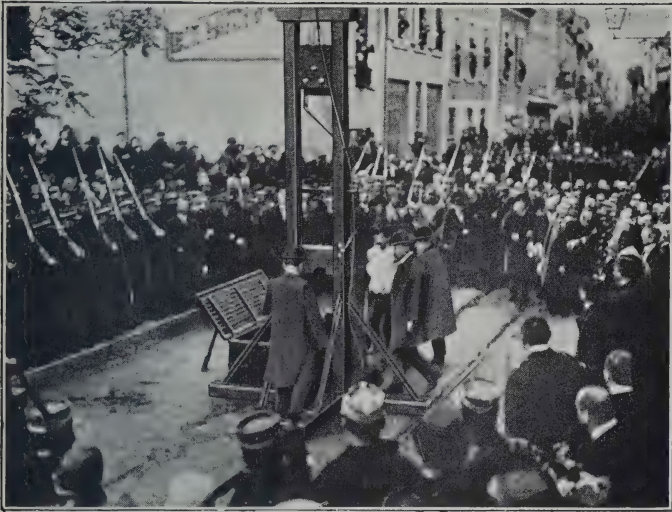
An imposing force of municipal guards and cycle police had to clear all the streets leading to the Palace of Justice on the last day, and no one but the representatives of the press were allowed inside the court. Pale and shaking, seven of the bandits heard the sentence of death pronounced; the others were sent to penal servitude for life.

One cold bleak day in October, I watched the dread instrument of justice arrive in two closed vans

at the Boulevard Arrago. Rough, sturdy men unloaded strangely shaped parts, pregnant with the coming tragedy. Slowly under their skilled hands rose a gaunt, dread shape, which has often haunted me in my dreams. Two upright posts loomed darkly against the sky; under the crosspiece hung a broad, triangular blade weighted with mercury. Its keen edge was covered with a leather sheath to protect it from the drizzling rain. Below it was the 'lunette,' a piece of wood with a hole in the centre, such as we see in pictures of the stocks, and divided in the middle. Under this was the 'bascule,' the board against which the criminal is strapped in an upright position and which then falls, bringing his head beneath the knife. Like wildfire the news at once spread that Latouche was to die the following morning, and the mounted dragoons and Republican guards had to use their sticks to keep the crowds back. Since many weeks all the windows overlooking the square had been let for large sums to relatives of the victims of the bandits. The hammers of the workmen were muffled, but the murmur from the dense mass of people, growing ever larger as the night wore on, rose and swelled like the roar of an approaching storm. Just before dawn I saw Deibler, the executioner, arrive, wrapped in a greatcoat. Slowly and carefully, by the light of a lantern, he examined and tested every part of the grisly machine, then at his order a dummy was fetched. With a dull thud the bascule fell, the top half of the lunette slid down, and with a hiss the knife dropped, shearing through the thick cloth stuffed with wool.

Twice again this was done; then the blade rose into its position with a click of finality. All was ready for the last act. A hush of expectancy passed over the waiting crowd. Somewhere a woman laughed shrilly, hysterically! The dawn was near, cold and grey. Although I knew how many poor innocent men and women the monster had done to death, I could not repress a shiver. There was something so dreadful about the methodical, deliberate preparations. A hand grasped my arm. Turning I perceived my friend Colbert standing beside me, his teeth chattering audibly. Suddenly I beheld a group of men approaching quickly. In their midst, held firmly by two powerful assistant executioners, was Latouche, in shirt and trousers. His hands were strapped behind his back and his shirt had been cut widely away from the neck. He looked small and frail, and as he passed by me I saw beads of agony glisten on his brow. My eyes were fixed on his neck — I could not tear them away. I saw him recoil as he reached the base of the guillotine; then he looked up at the knife and around him at the motionless soldiers. His shoulders went back with a gesture of disdain and his harsh voice pealed out in a yell of defiance, 'Vive l'Anarchie!'

The two men who grasped his arms forced him up the three steps leading to the scaffold; there he was seized — a click — a thud — a raucous cry of mortal fear, and Latouche had paid his debt. How his men died I do not know, for I hurried away from that dreadful place as quickly as I could. I had seen enough.



Latouche stands before the guillotine in shirt and trousers. The box above the blade is filled with mercury to give it weight. At one side is the basket into which the body rolls. The release is on the upright at right. Note the people in the windows.



Two seconds later. The knife has dropped and Latouche's body is in the basket. These are probably the only existing photographs of an execution in France.

#### THE EXECUTION OF LATOUCHE





## EPISODE IV

CAPTAIN VON CÖPENICK, CONVICT AND HUMORIST



EPISODE IV  
CAPTAIN VON CÖPENICK  
CONVICT AND HUMORIST

IT is not often that an offence against the law is amusing; less still that it amuses the whole world. In this respect the crime committed by one Frederick Voigt, later known as Captain von Cöpenick, is truly an exception, and since, unfortunately, most of my reminiscences deal with evil passions, cruelty, and bloodshed, I may be pardoned for relating one of the few experiences I ever had whilst under Dr. Bertillon which does not enter into this category.

It may seem strange, and even hard to believe, that I have been personally involved in so many extraordinary and exciting events in various countries. This is only apparently so, however.

If one remembers that weird, grotesque, and cruel crimes take place daily in every country and in almost every large town, the few which I can relate from personal experience dwindle to a very small number, indeed. I know that every criminal investigator, every one of the active, fearless members of that busy hive called Scotland Yard, could relate, if he would, as many and more adventures than have fallen to my share. The only difference is that my experiences are cosmopolitan, due to the fact that I speak many tongues and that all my life I have

been a wanderer, roaming from town to town and from land to land. The world is beautiful and interesting, and I have never been able to resist the fascination of travel.

When I hear the siren of a ship or the shrill whistle of a locomotive, and watch the long line of carriages rush into the dim distance, or the vessel slowly leave the harbour, an irresistible desire to wander seizes me.

As a boy of fifteen I once travelled from London to Berlin, without a penny in my pocket, merely for a wager and out of curiosity, in order to ascertain what it felt like to be alone and penniless abroad. The trip had many drawbacks, at the time, but it was an experience never to be forgotten.

I have worked in the stokehold of an ocean trader, from Fiji to Samoa, where to keep alive one had to drink raw gin from the bottle. It nearly killed me; but, oh, the joy of looking back to an eventful life later, seated in a comfortable chair, the hardships softened by time and distance! A man's span of life does not count by the number of years he has lived, but by the things which have happened during those years. Could I travel in no other way, I would become a tramp, only in order to keep moving and not to stagnate in a rut.

I was therefore overjoyed when one day I received instructions to go to Berlin and to place myself at the disposal of Herr von Jagow, the Chief of Police, in order to study the methods of the German Criminal Investigation (Geheimpolizei) and instruct

them in the recently perfected anthropometrical system evolved by Dr. Bertillon. A close collaboration between all countries with a mutual exchange of ideas in scientific criminal investigation was considered by Monsieur Dufresne and his colleagues to be the best means of combating crime.

The 'portrait parlé,' the speaking portrait, as it was called, was then quite new and the exclusive property of the Paris Sûreté. This is a photograph of the criminal, once convicted, with lines running over the surface to the ears, eyes, nose, and mouth, and so grouped, measured, and classified that it is impossible for the criminal to disguise himself or ever again to escape recognition.

Wilhelm Voigt, whom the world soon called Captain von Cöpenick, was a man who knew the weakness of his country well. Was he gifted with a wonderful sense of humour, or did he simply know from experience the awe with which that élite, the Prussian officer, was regarded, in a land where a uniform, *any uniform*, lifted its wearer high above the common herd. It may be just the latter, but his exploit was hailed with delight by everyone, high and low, who for years had been forced to kow-tow and make way humbly for the swaggering, sabre-clanking officers. This man, a little shoemaker with crooked legs and enormous hands, had spent fifteen years in hard labour as a convict. Yet, by donning a second-hand uniform, that of a captain, which he bought at a sale of old clothing, he was able to order the arrest of three high officials, rob



the town hall of all its funds, and tear to shreds the legend of that superiority, which for centuries had draped the military caste in the toga of the Cæsars.

The crime in itself was not a serious one, but every servant of the Kaiser gritted his teeth with rage when the truth became known, and would willingly have killed the ex-convict; for we all know that nothing hurts like ridicule.

I well remember the wild theories of the German Sûreté when the news of the outrage first arrived. It was believed that an officer of the guards had suddenly lost his reason, and men were sent in haste to all the barracks, in Berlin and Spandau, to enquire if a captain were missing. Thus it was that, since I happened to be in Berlin in October, 1906, I was able to follow the various phases of the investigation of one of the most original exploits ever conceived, and to be present at the capture of the criminal.

One morning Herr Wasserman, chief of the department in which I was working, came in excitedly and asked me if I cared to accompany him to the little town of Cöpenick, not far from Berlin, where an extraordinary outrage had been committed the day before.

A captain of the guards, followed by twenty soldiers, had suddenly appeared in Cöpenick on the previous afternoon. He had marched to the town hall, where he and his men had halted. Issuing sharp commands in the usual harsh manner, he had posted six men outside the building to guard the

entrance, giving strict orders that no one was to be admitted.

A curious crowd naturally collected at once, but *the local police*, seeing the soldiers, had dispersed them and *kept the street clear*.

The officer, followed by the remainder of the men; amongst whom one had been chosen as acting sergeant or Feldwebel, entered the office of the chief Secretary of State, Herr Rosenkranz. 'In the name of the Kaiser,' he bellowed, 'I have orders to place you under arrest.'

Two of the men at a sign from their captain took their stations beside the startled official with fixed bayonets. To all the questions of the secretary the officer replied: 'You will know the reason for this soon enough. I am sending you to Berlin. I daresay you can guess why.'

With a gasp the frightened man sank back into his chair. Resistance was useless.

In the adjoining room was the Bürgermeister, Dr. Langerhans. Throwing open the door, the captain strode in. When asked by the mayor what authority for such high-handed action he possessed, he replied brutally: 'My authority! There are my soldiers, that is authority enough for you. You are also under arrest. Where are the municipal funds?' The mayor tremblingly replied that these were in the bookkeeper's office on the ground floor. Thither the captain went. Entering the office with a swagger, he demanded the keys of the safe from the astonished accountant, von Wiltberg. The latter hesitated a moment. Seeing this, the officer snarled,

'I am responsible for the money now — the Kaiser's orders.' Cowed and awestruck at the dreadful name, von Wiltberg silently handed over the money, four thousand marks and seventy pfennigs (then about two hundred pounds). The officer counted the money, placed it carefully in an envelope, which he then closed and sealed with the municipal seal, and slipped into his breast-pocket. Then he wrote out a receipt and signed it, with a flourish.

Calling one of his soldiers he sent for two cabs and, ordering the mayor and the secretary to follow, he forced them to enter each one a vehicle. A soldier took his seat beside the coachman, another sat inside to guard the prisoner. Thereupon the captain ordered the coachmen to drive to the Neue Wache, the chief guard-rooms, Unter den Linden, in Berlin. The other soldiers he ordered back to their barracks. He himself walked towards the railway station, *saluted respectfully by the local police* — and was never seen again.

'Without a doubt,' my friend Wasserman said, 'it is an officer who has suddenly become insane, who is responsible for such a crazy freak.'

The poor Bürgermeister, his secretary, and the four soldiers who had accompanied them, were now truly under arrest for having allowed themselves to be victimised.

The other soldiers were temporarily consigned to barracks and we were going to question them; afterwards we would go to Cöpenick. At the barracks the crestfallen men told us an extraordinary story.

They had been drilling during the morning at the large parade ground outside the town and were returning to their quarters when an officer whom they met called peremptorily to them to halt. They did so. He curtly told them to follow him, in the name of the Kaiser. Naturally it never entered their heads to question his authority. On the way to the Rathaus — the town hall — they met another squad, and these were also ordered to follow. Halting them at the corner of the main street, the captain had picked out one of them and informed him that for the afternoon he would be 'acting sergeant.' They admitted that they were ready to carry out any orders given them — even to use their arms if need be.

From these innocent accomplices we obtained only a vague description of the captain. The acting sergeant said that they had met several officers on the way. One of them, a lieutenant, belonged to their own regiment.

We were able to question him. He confessed that he had been surprised to see these men marching as though on duty, but he supposed that they were on some special mission, since a captain accompanied them. He had been struck at the time by something not quite normal in the appearance of this officer, and later remembered that the captain was wearing a sash, with which he should, of course, wear the regulation helmet, instead of the cap he had on. Otherwise there had been nothing out of the way in the man's appearance.

The enquiry at the town hall was not very en-

couraging. We took possession of the receipt for the money, which the accountant handed us with a very woe-begone air. It was written in a cramped and irregular hand, and the signature was just a scrawl. One thing I noticed and pointed out to Herr Wasserman; under the scrawl was the word 'Hauptmann' (captain). This had been written 'Hauptman.' 'It looks as if the fellow did not know how to spell,' I said. Herr Wasserman shrugged his shoulders. 'An officer — what rubbish! They are all university men.'

'That's just it — perhaps he was no officer at all.'

Herr Wasserman looked at me pityingly. 'As if our soldiers and the police, to say nothing of the Bürgermeister, would not have discovered that at once. You have seen our Prussian officers. There is something about them — an air of distinction — which no one could imitate. Breeding always tells.'

How my poor friend must have regretted these words later, when the truth could no longer be withheld. Several days were spent in searching and enquiring everywhere — but nothing was discovered. What was worse was that now the officers who had met the captain, and the two unhappy officials who had been sent to Berlin, began to fear that the whole thing had been a hoax; and for their own protection described the man we were seeking as having been tall and handsome. I could see that the police were not very anxious to find him, but had to continue the investigation in deference to the outcry in the papers. Worst of all, no captain was missing from any regiment.



A few days later, Herr Wasserman came to me triumphantly.

‘You see, I was right. I said that only an officer could have committed that outrage in Cöpenick. We have just been informed that Oberlieutenant Karl von Langebach, of the Fourth Hussars, stationed near Karlshorst, has disappeared. His comrades had all noticed that for some time the lieutenant had been queer in his ways. There was a love affair, a quarrel with his fiancée, which preyed on his mind. The parents of the girl did not consider him wealthy enough: poor devil, he had nothing but his pay and a small allowance from an aunt. Lately he had taken to reckless gambling and lost heavily. Nearly all his fellow officers hold some of his I.O.U.’s. Two days before this business in Cöpenick he disappeared. Several people saw him riding wildly through the forest. No doubt his troubles turned his brain. Since then no one knows what has become of him. He is the man we have to look for.’

We questioned the people at a small Bierhaus in the extensive woods surrounding the little locality where the lieutenant had last been seen. They informed us that the lieutenant had appeared suddenly one evening on a foam-flecked horse, and with hoarse voice and wild gestures demanded brandy. Of this he had swallowed several glasses, then he had tossed them a gold ten-mark piece, and, brutally spurring his horse, had ridden away. They showed us the path he had taken. It had rained heavily since then, but, although no traces of his passing could be seen on the ground, the police

argued that a horse and rider could not disappear in a neighbourhood where so many people, foresters, labourers, and gamekeepers, were constantly passing. Herr Wasserman ascertained that the lieutenant stopped at the little roadside tavern on the evening of the day when the robbery in Cöpenick had taken place. Without a doubt von Langebach — insane and obsessed by the desire to obtain money — had committed it. Now he was probably hiding in one of the many empty foresters' shelters, or perhaps in one of the abandoned charcoal-burners' dwellings. While some of the police officers spread out and searched the lanes and paths, Herr Wasserman and two of the Sûreté officials invited me to come with them along the broad road to Rummelsburg. It was now almost night, but there was a full moon which rose early, so we should not want for light. It was eerie work walking through the forest. The trees assumed strange shapes. Twisted branches overhanging the path looked like knotted muscular arms, whilst in the distance dogs barked and owls hooted. Every moment we expected a dangerous madman to spring out on us with drawn sword. Somewhere in that forest he must be hiding, perhaps watching and waiting to commit another robbery. We had gone some distance and the rising moon was already visible, huge and red amongst the trees, when we heard running feet and shouts behind us.

Wheeling round with fast beating hearts, we saw that it was one of the police. He came up to us breathless and gasping.

‘Come back, Herr Wasserman — the Oberlieutenant — we have found him. He is dead and his horse too.’

Greatly startled at the news, we followed the panting, exhausted man along the way we had come and then down one of the side paths. After an hour’s walk we came upon a dreadful sight. In a clearing, bathed in the rays of the moon now well above us, a knot of men surrounded a huge oak. From one of the branches dangled a stark figure with swollen, distorted face. The large sword and glittering spurs immediately caught our gaze. It was poor Lieutenant von Langebach. Before him on the ground lay his horse; a bullet in its brain. The bridle had been removed and was now around the madman’s throat.

A further examination showed that he must have attached the bridle to the limb from which he was hanging and then around his neck, leaving no slack. Then he had placed the muzzle of his revolver to his horse’s head and fired. The horse was instantly killed, and, dropping, left its master hanging in the air. The investigation proved conclusively that the poor madman could never have committed the outrage in Cöpenick. Again the German Sûreté were at their wits’ end. Every paper began ridiculing them and many were the comic cartoons published.

Then, suddenly, a workman, crossing the Tempelhofer Feld, a large public recreation ground on the outskirts of the metropolis, discovered a dirty bundle of clothes. A captain’s uniform, complete with sash and tassels, but with a cap instead of a

helmet. It was impossible to hush the matter up. The uniform, stained and dirty, from which the regimental marks and number had been cut, was the one worn by the mysterious captain. Nor was it possible to sustain the legend of a mad officer, for the absence of the number tabs proved conclusively that this uniform was an old one, probably bought from a second-hand clothes dealer. The military caste, from the Kaiser to youthful cadets, were furious; and still declared that, even if the uniform was an old one, the wearer must have been one of them. But the public — the non-uniformed citizens — shook with laughter. What a splendid joke!

Peremptory orders came from an exalted quarter. The man must be found. Privately I communicated with Dr. Bertillon. He advised me to try what could be done with the receipt. Both the marks on the paper and the writing should help us. Unfortunately, the Berlin Sûreté had only lately commenced classifying finger-prints and handwriting. They did, however, much against their will, send the receipt to the big prison at Moabit and to several other similar places. The prison books were searched for handwriting that might resemble it. And they found that an old shoemaker named Friedrich Wilhelm Voigt, sentenced to fifteen years' hard labour for housebreaking and liberated only six months previously, had possessed a scrawl that was wonderfully like that of the famous receipt.

But that was impossible! Quite impossible!

Voigt was short, bandy-legged, and ugly, long past middle age, with enormous hands, broken teeth,

and all the hallmarks of the jail bird. Nonsense! Rubbish! — Herr Wasserman laughed heartily at what he called the absurd impertinence of the warder who discovered the entry in the prison books. He laughed less boisterously when this warder, a man who was evidently not afraid to speak his mind, brought a convict named Hartman before the governor. To him Hartman related a strange story. Voigt and he had been mates, and often worked side by side. Towards the end of the shoemaker's sentence, the latter had spoken several times in vague terms of a great scheme which he had conceived. When Hartman asked for details, Voigt had put him off. But one day he said, 'I am going to be an officer and bluff all the police.'

Hartman laughed and thought it was meant as a joke, but when he heard what had happened from the warder, under whom he worked for many years, he at once remembered what Voigt had said. The governor refused to listen to the ridiculous story, but the tale leaked out. Probably the warder or perhaps recently liberated prisoners were responsible for this. So the Sûreté had to act. Prison photographs of the shoemaker were shown to the accountant and the Bürgermeister. They did not recognise the man at all. The soldiers who had acted in the comedy at Cöpenick also swore that the appearance of the captain who had stopped them was totally different.

One of them, however, had in the meantime served his three years as a soldier and was now a civilian, free from the military yoke. He at once



declared that, although the uniform and the cap made a difference, the picture was undoubtedly that of the captain. A search for Voigt now commenced. Rewards for his capture were offered by the police and by the newspapers. He was run to earth at last in a poor lodging in the east end of Berlin at number 22 Langestrassé. When we entered the dirty little room, Voigt was sitting in his shirt-sleeves at a low bench, mending shoes. At sight of the detectives he grinned and said:

‘Morning, gentlemen; what can I do for you? I don’t make shoes now, but I still repair them.’

When he was told that he would have to accompany them, he seemed surprised.

‘Why,’ he said, ‘I have done nothing wrong. I am earning my living honestly.’

He was taken to the cells and examined by the ‘Untersuchungsrichter’ — the investigating judge. He swore that he knew nothing about the hold-up in uniform.

When confronted by the Bürgermeister of Cöpenick, the latter was indignant and swore that he had never seen the man before. It is possible that he did so in good faith, for Voigt was dirty, unshaven, and ill-dressed, and by no stretch of the imagination could one picture him as an officer. The judge realised this also. He ordered the uniform to be fetched and put on Voigt. When this was done, it was seen that the sleeves and trousers were much too long and that he looked more than ever like a scarecrow. One of the inspectors was about to take the uniform off when he noticed some pieces of

thread hanging from one sleeve. Calling for needle and cotton, he turned in the sleeves and trousers and sewed them quickly at the spot where the threads were found. A barber was then fetched and Voigt was washed and shaven and his hair cut and carefully brushed. The result was wonderful. The ex-soldier and the accountant were then brought in. The start they gave at the sight of Voigt was not lost on the judge. There was no longer any doubt. It was truly the ugly little shoemaker who had coolly arrested the two most important officials of Cöpenick and robbed the safe.

At the trial the envelope with the broken seal was sworn to by the accountant. For some curious reason Voigt had kept this and it had been found in his room. What he had done with the money he refused to say. Handwriting experts proved conclusively that the receipt was in the shoemaker's writing.

For days vast crowds waited outside the court.

He was sentenced to four years' imprisonment by a judge who had much ado to keep a straight face during the trial. When the verdict was known, the crowd yelled and hooted, and cries of 'Let him go! Reward him! Don't punish him!' sounded from all sides. The police had great difficulty in restoring order. In deference to public opinion the Kaiser commuted the sentence to two years.

Voigt, now known as the 'Hauptmann von Cöpenick,' became famous in the whole world, and when he was released he found that wealth was his. An old lady when dying had made a will, leaving him

all her money: 'Because he provided me with the best laugh I ever had,' the will stated. Others followed her example, and the old cobbler was able to spend the rest of his life in comfort.

I spoke to him after the trial, before he was taken away. At first he would not say much, for he had seen me with the detectives. When I told him that I was an Englishman studying German police methods, he grinned.

'I should never have been caught,' he said, 'if it had not been for Hartman — however, I'll be even with him some day. You English have a silly proverb, have you not, that "clothes don't make a man." Well — do you still believe it?'

I laughed. 'It doesn't apply to uniforms nor to Germany, Hauptmann,' and, saluting in the Prussian manner, I left him.

EPISODE V

HERR GRUNENTHAL OF THE REICHSBANK AND  
HIS TRAGIC LOVE





## EPISODE V

### HERR GRUNENTHAL OF THE REICHSBANK

#### AND HIS TRAGIC LOVE

I HAVE never thought of Paul Grunenthal as a criminal, although the offence he committed is punished in his country with twenty years' penal servitude. He was a man exposed to a temptation so great that I often wonder how many in this world would have resisted it from sheer stern moral principles; and the temptation was the greater because he knew full well that there was barely one chance in a million of his offence ever being discovered. Yet that one chance, like a tiny black cloud on the horizon, growing, swelling, expanding, and bringing with it a terrible storm, inevitably culminated in his downfall; for he had not reckoned with the evil soul of the girl for whom he bartered life and honour. She was the flaw in his chain of reasoning.

Because of Emma Gotz, the woman in the case, his offence became a crime, which cost three human lives.

Great riches within reach of his hand, almost certain impunity, and a passionate longing for youth and beauty, created a vortex in which he was irresistibly whirled to destruction. How the little imp of the perverse, into whose power a man falls when he enters the forbidden territory of sinful passion, must have laughed with unholy glee, as he stirred

the ingredients for the coming tragedy. A man of honour and virtue past middle age; not rich, yet daily handling great wealth; a girl base, but beautiful, whose vanity ruled her; her lover — a beast of the criminal underworld, and the mother — of the dregs — cruel and greedy; these the demon cast into life's cauldron and then left them to ferment, adding first the spices he knew so well how to choose with cunning brain.

I met Paul Grunenthal for the first time whilst I was in Berlin, instructing the German Sûreté in the methods of Paris. I had gone to visit the 'Reichsdruckerei,' the printing works belonging to the State Bank, where marvellously efficient presses stamped on multicoloured paper the complex designs which represented the money of the period, 100, 500, and 1000 marks; then the equivalent of our £5, £25, and £50 Bank of England notes.

He was director of this department, and his duty was to eliminate and destroy those notes which had the tiniest flaw, imperceptible often to any but his expert examination. The numbers of the bank-notes thus weeded out were entered by Paul Grunenthal in a ledger and the notes were then burned. I remember asking at the time what would happen if the numbers were not entered and the bank-notes stolen by someone.

'Oh,' he said, with a good-natured laugh, 'I am responsible for their immediate destruction, before the perfect notes are sent away. No one else knows which are faulty, and I have done this for years.

They do not represent money to me at all. But of course if I were to betray my trust — why, it might be years before it was noticed that duplicate numbers were in circulation.'

'Then other bank-notes are printed with the same series number as those which are destroyed?' I asked.

Herr Grunenthal nodded and showed me several notes, challenging me to pick out those with a flaw. Only in the case of one, where the watermark had a double outline, could I say for certain that it differed from those which had been passed.

A year later all Berlin was startled to learn that Paul Grunenthal had been arrested for fraudulently retaining and using as money rejected bank-notes which he had carried away from the Reichsbank instead of burning them. The sum he thus obtained was over twenty thousand pounds. The trial was the most sensational ever known in Germany and lasted nine days. Terribly tragic facts came to light. Herr Grunenthal had abandoned his wife and two children in order to be free to woo a young girl named Emma Gotz, who was noted for her extraordinary beauty amongst the many artists to whom she had often sat as a model. The stolen money had all been spent on fine dresses, jewels, and every conceivable luxury for this girl, yet she it was who had callously denounced her lover to the police and who gave evidence during the trial which left him no loophole of escape. Paul Grunenthal was sentenced to fifteen years' hard labour, but committed suicide in court immediately after the sentence. The girl

herself was murdered not long after and her murderer beheaded.

I have pieced the whole tragic story together from the facts in the possession of the police, from an interview which I had with Grunenthal after his arrest, and from a long conversation with the girl, when, shaken and terrified, she staggered out of the court where, a few moments earlier, the man who had given all for her sake had crashed head first to the stone floor from the high staircase up which the police were leading him. I can thus cast it into a coherent, continuous narrative instead of merely relating facts and details. The story is perfectly true and the reader can obtain the proof of this by writing to any of the Berlin newspapers.

The waiters of the well-known restaurant and Weinhaus Kempinsky, in the Leipziger Strasse, were busily arranging flowers and glasses, plates and snowy napkins, at a long table set in the centre of the special dining-room reserved for guests of honour. Herr Grunenthal, lately retired from the Reichsbank, was giving a sumptuous dinner to some friends that evening, and he was noted for his fastidious tastes and open-handed generosity. Furthermore, he drank nothing but champagne, and that alone placed him above the other diners.

'He can afford it,' said Karl, the head waiter, confidentially to one of his men. 'Only a month ago he came here one evening from the Karlshorst races with a great big bundle of thousand-mark notes. He had backed a hundred-to-one chance; you re-

member the French horse *Noir de Fumée* came in first, when everyone had expected the favourite to win. A lucky man truly. They say he is making a fortune on the stock exchange also. Everything he touches succeeds. But he spends it all on that girl Emma Gotz. Ja — she is beautiful — I grant you that — but a plebeian. Of the “*canaille*,” as the French say, and the mother — *du lieber Gott* — she used to sell papers at the kiosk in the *Friedrich Strasse* before Herr Grunenthal came along. She eats asparagus with a knife — truly, I have seen her. Herr Grunenthal should choose a lady. Quick — here they are.’

A noisy, lively company had filed in and Karl clicked his heels together and bent low as Herr Grunenthal came up to him.

‘I’ve just discovered that we are thirteen. That will never do, Karl. I am superstitious as all gamblers are. I have won again to-day at the races. You shall have a royal trinkgeld, but find me someone to invite. Is there no one here whom I know?’

‘Jawohl, Herr Grunenthal, there is the Chief of the *Geheimpolizei*, von Jagow — all alone over by the window; no doubt the Herr knows him.’

For a moment Paul Grunenthal turned pale and looked startled; then he said angrily, ‘*Donnerwetter*, Karl, why should I know any of the police? What the dickens do you mean?’

‘But,’ stammered the disconcerted waiter, ‘the Herr used to be a State official — I thought, perhaps ——’

‘No, no — I don’t know him and don’t want to;



get me some poor devil from the street who doesn't often eat his fill — he shall fare well to-night. By the way — does that Chief of Police often come here?'

'Oh, ya, Herr — very often.' Visibly relieved, Grunenthal approached his guests who were preparing to take their places.

'One minute, my friends. We are unfortunately thirteen and, as you know, I'm very superstitious. I have told the Kellner to fetch someone. My sweet Emma shall sit at the head of the table. I will sit at her right and the stranger at her left. That will be very amusing.'

At that moment the head waiter returned, followed by a young man whose ill-fitting, patched clothes and worn shoes could not altogether destroy a certain lithe grace, but whose handsome if rather vulgar face was pinched and pale and his mop of curly fair hair badly in need of a barber's attention. His grey eyes scanned the assembled fashionable guests with a keen, penetrating glance, finally coming to rest on the flushed and vivacious face of Emma Gotz. As she turned and encountered his eager gaze, the colour slowly faded from her cheeks and she grew deathly pale. No one noticed this, however, for Grunenthal greeted the newcomer boisterously and enquired his name.

'Heinrich Lange, sir,' he replied in a low voice.

'Then to-night you shall be Baron von Lange. Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to present the Baron, knight of the knife and fork, for one evening only ——'

Everyone laughed at the joke and bowed with exaggerated courtesy, and the dinner began. The fourteenth guest took little part in the conversation, but now and then his burning glance strayed to his fair neighbour and rested with a queer expression on her face until, obviously against her will, her eyes met and were held by his. During the meal, which was noisy and gay, many pedlars, such as are allowed to enter and ply their trade in German restaurants, came to the table — girls selling flowers, tipsters, dealers in jewellery; and finally, when coffee was served, a little Jew came who was well known to everyone, for he sold tickets in the State lotteries. He was at once hailed with delight by all. Paul Grunenthal ordered him to let each of his guests choose a ticket and, when all had done so, he also drew one from the bundle held out to him and thrust it carelessly into his pocket.

‘Be very careful of the ticket, Herr,’ said the Jew. ‘I know you vill vin. Gott — if I vere as lucky as the Herr Grunenthal! Always vat he touches, it turns to gold; and if you *do* vin, you vill not forget Solomon Levy who sold you de ticket — and who vill deserve a commission?’

‘No,’ replied Grunenthal, laughing. ‘If I win you shall come and get a handsome commission, Levy.’

At the conclusion of this banquet the host rose and toasted the queen of the evening, his beloved Emma, and, drawing a leather case from his pocket, he disclosed a beautiful diamond pendant, which excited cries of envy and admiration from everyone

present. This he fastened around the neck of the blushing, delighted girl.

'Is she not beautiful?' he demanded, turning from one to the other amid applause and shouts of approbation. He did not notice the sudden flash of greed in the eyes of the young man, Heinrich Lange, nor, when the party broke up and he dismissed him with a couple of gold coins, did he notice the furtive handclasp between the girl in silk and satin and the vagabond whom he had feasted.

The next day Herr Grunenthal called at the beautiful apartment, which he had taken and furnished with every comfort and luxury that money could buy. He had presented it, with the lease and a receipt for the rent for three years in advance, to the girl Emma Gotz, who lived there with her mother Frau Gotz, formerly known as 'Old Latsche, the paper-seller.' As he entered the hall, letting himself in with the latch-key which he had stipulated should always be his, he was startled to hear a man's voice proceeding from the salon. With two strides he crossed to the door and threw it wide. In the room and apparently deep in an argument with the mother was the man who had made the fourteenth guest the night before, Heinrich Lange. Angrily Paul Grunenthal demanded to know what he was doing there.

'Ach, Herr Grunenthal,' Frau Gotz replied, without appearing in the least embarrassed, 'dear Emma dropped her bag last night when she stepped into the carriage and this honest young man brought it a few minutes ago.'

‘How did he know where to bring it?’ Grunenthal enquired suspiciously.

‘But, natürlich, her address was inside on some letters. I told Mr. Lange to wait, because he is in need of work, and I was sure you would help him to find a situation.’

‘Good — all right — I will see; let him come to my house in the Magdeburger Strasse to-morrow afternoon. Here is a thaler for his trouble now.’

Murmuring his thanks the unwelcome visitor withdrew. Paul Grunenthal was tigerishly jealous, for he well knew that his beloved Emma had many admirers among the bohemians and artists, and the fear that, notwithstanding his generosity and the constant rain of presents and money which he showered upon her, she would obey the call of youth and leave him, had become an obsession. The more so since she had as yet conceded nothing but a few half-hearted kisses in return for his devotion.

‘And how is my angel to-day?’ he asked, after the man had gone. ‘Why is she not here to greet me?’

‘She is dressing, making herself beautiful for you,’ the old creature purred with an oily smile. ‘She has spent the morning trying on the lovely gowns which arrived from the dressmaker. By the way, there is the bill — five thousand marks. If Herr Grunenthal will give me the money, I will pay the messenger when he calls.’

With an absent-minded expression the infatuated man handed her five bank-notes which she almost crumpled in her eagerness to grasp them.

‘And now,’ he said, ‘go and call my sweet darling.’

A few minutes later the girl appeared. She stood a moment in the doorway for effect, as her mother had taught her to do, whilst Grunenthal feasted his eyes on her supple, comely form. Emma Gotz was beautiful and knew the power of her charms full well. Her waving auburn hair and white skin were a splendid frame for the large grey eyes, which gazed with such well-feigned shyness at her middle-aged admirer. Barely nineteen, she was fully developed and her rounded breast rose and fell with simulated agitation. Poor Grunenthal little dreamed that the whole scene had been carefully rehearsed before his arrival.

‘My beautiful darling,’ he said, sighing like a lovesick schoolboy, ‘how fascinating you are! Did you like the dresses I ordered for you? Come and sit beside me and tell me. You are not wearing my pendant! Why is that?’

‘No,’ the girl replied, ‘mother says that diamonds are not in good taste with this dress. I should love some emerald earrings, they would suit my hair and the gown also.’

‘You shall have them; I will go at once to the jeweller Schlesinger and tell him to send you several to choose from. You know I can refuse you nothing, sweetheart. Now give me a kiss, for I have something very important for you.’

The kiss was given hesitatingly, but, at the touch of her red lips, Grunenthal seized her hungrily, fiercely almost, and cried, ‘Oh, my darling, how I



love you, when will you be all mine? Your kisses madden me, but they do not satisfy my burning desire.'

'But you cannot marry me, Paul,' Emma Gotz simpered. 'You know you are married already.'

'Sweet innocence — there are other things besides marriage; but of course your pure mind cannot understand what I mean by that — Never mind now, I must give you my latest offering.'

Drawing a bulky envelope from his pocket he pressed it into her hands.

'In this are a hundred thousand marks; five thousand pounds in English railway bonds. Thus I free you for ever from the possibility of again becoming poor. If anything should happen to me at any time, you must let no one know that you have them.'

'Oh, Paul, you *are* generous!' the girl exclaimed. 'I do believe you truly love me. But what can happen to you that makes you speak like that? You are quite pale!'

'Nothing, nothing, sweetheart, of course; it's just a thought. Lately I have been altogether too lucky. Now, au revoir — and remember my words.'

Herr Grunenthal again crushed the girl to him, kissing her hair and brow, and then rose to leave, reluctantly enough. It would have been better had he been able to hear the shrieks of laughter which greeted the slam of the door, and in which a man's deep voice joined heartily.

Paul Grunenthal walked thoughtfully through the park to his own apartment. The mention of his wife had made him sad. What was she doing and

how were his two children? True he sent them money in plenty — but that was merely in order to ease his conscience. Why had Fate caused him to meet Emma Gotz? Certainly until he met her, life had been dull and monotonous — but what was waiting for him at the end of this feverish existence? Did he love the girl or was it merely the demon desire which tortured him? What if his theft of the many thousands of bank-notes were discovered some day? Ruin, disgrace, and prison would be his share then. Feeling unusually depressed he entered his bachelor home. His servant came forward and informed him that a gentleman from the Reichsbank had waited for some time and had only just left; he had told the servant to request Herr Grunenthal to call at the Director's office in the morning. His guilty conscience sensed ominous news in this message. Did they suspect already? At all costs he must rid himself of the bundle of bank-notes still in his safe. Where could he hide them securely? Feverishly Grunenthal entered his library and locked the door; then he manipulated the combination of a small safe in the wall and drew from it a bulky package of bank-notes of various values. These he proceeded to examine one by one with a powerful lens, spreading them out before him on the table. Could they be used? — was the problem which troubled him. His stock of ready money was fast dwindling, for in reality his winnings at the races had been insignificant. No, he finally decided with a sigh, several of them had obvious faults; for the moment it would be too risky. Better, far better, to reduce the

mad expenditure to which he had given way the last few months. Even constant winnings on the turf could hardly explain his sudden accession to wealth. That was how people were always found out, he reflected. They never *could* refrain from spending more than was compatible with their position. For a long time he sat with his head bowed on his hands and reviewed the past. Night had come when at last with a sigh he rose and switched on the table-lamp. As he did so, an icy, numbing shock contracted his heart, for in the mirror above the mantel he had caught sight of a face peering out from behind the curtains. Could it be the police — already? Trembling and shaking in every fibre, Grunenthal returned to the table where the damning evidence of the stolen notes was in full view of the hidden watcher. Quickly he gathered them together and snapping an elastic band around the bundle threw it into his safe and slammed the door. Then he turned to face the intruder, but the latter had evidently guessed that the mirror had betrayed him, for at the same instant a lithe form stepped from behind the heavy curtain, an ugly-looking knife gripped menacingly in one hand. The man's face was hidden by a scarf wound about the lower part and his cap was pulled down hiding the eyes. With a gasp of relief Grunenthal retreated to the table, assured that this was no detective indeed, but a burglar. If he could only reach the pistol which he kept in a drawer. Instantly, as if the man guessed his thoughts, a sneering voice came from the folds of the scarf.

‘Don’t move your hands, Herr Director of the

Reichsbank. Your pistol is in my pocket. I came to get money, but I guess that I'll not have any of that which you have just been examining. So we are two of a trade, eh? Criminals both. You rob the State — and I came to rob you.' With the words the intruder pulled the cloth away from his face. It was the young man Lange.

'I am beginning to think I can make more by selling my information to the police,' he continued, 'for you'll soon be caught, anyhow, but "honour among thieves," eh, Mein Herr? What will you give me if I don't sell you?'

Grunenthal sat down heavily — his brow wet with perspiration. A slow, dull despair rose like an engulfing flood, paralysing his reason. So this was the end. His secret was a secret no longer.

'I can give you two thousand marks in gold,' he said listlessly; 'that is all I have now.'

How to gain time and be able to destroy that terrible evidence in the safe? Like a foolish refrain the thought repeated itself with the throb of his temples.

Lange laughed. 'Hand it over, then, but you'll give me those stolen notes as well. I'm not going to let you destroy them. While I have them you'll pay, and more than once.'

Grunenthal rose and unlocked the safe; then he held out the bundle — his mind was made up. As Lange stretched out his hand for them, Grunenthal struck him a crushing blow on the wrist with his keys, sending the knife clattering to the floor, at the same instant he caught his tormentor by the throat

and threw him to the ground. 'I'll kill you,' he said with a terrible resolve in his voice. 'Then you cannot inform against me. You are a housebreaker and I am acting in self-defence.'

The man's face grew slowly purple — he raised shaking hands, pleading for mercy. Grunenthal, whose good nature was already in revolt against his own violence, released his grip slightly. Lange gulped long shuddering breaths of air.

'If you had killed me,' he said at last, 'you would have broken the heart of Emma Gotz. I am her half-brother.'

Grunenthal rose and pointed to the door.

'Go, and for her sake, then — keep my secret.'

The man staggered to the door without a word and Grunenthal conducted him to the hall. As soon as he was alone again, he dressed himself in a dark overcoat, pulled his hat over his eyes, and, thrusting the stolen notes into his pocket, hurried out. He had decided on a hiding-place. They might be necessary to him some day when all his money had been spent. Already there was little enough in reserve, therefore he would not destroy them. If after all the Reichsbank did not suspect him, those notes meant ease and luxury and — Emma Gotz.

An hour's drive brought him to the cemetery where his mother lay buried. He would hide the money under the headstone. No one would ever think of looking there. It was an easy matter for him to climb the low wall which divided the burial ground from the open country, and in a short time he was beside the grave he knew so well, straining with



all his might to lift a corner of the stone. It was not so heavy as he had imagined; quickly he slipped the package into the ground and allowed the piece of marble to settle back into its place. Thank Heaven, that was over — now he was safe!

The next morning he called at the Reichsbank and was relieved to find that the Director merely wished to consult him on a technical question; his long experience was invaluable to the bank and it was not the first time that this had happened. What a fool he had been to feel afraid! Gaily humming a song, Herr Grunenthal strode homewards, even stopping on the way to buy a paper. A glaring headline across the centre of the page was like a blow in the face and caused him to stagger dizzily — for a moment the street whirled round in a fantastic dance. Already! And he had felt so happy!

Without attempting to read the details in public, he hailed a cab and drove home. When he was safely shut in his study, Grunenthal unfolded the paper. There it was — dreadful, horrible! — and he groaned with anguish.

‘Extraordinary discovery in a cemetery,’ he read. ‘This morning, whilst replacing a temporary headstone over the grave of a little child, the grave-digger Putschke, found a package wrapped in a piece of oiled cloth under the base of the stone. Upon opening this he was startled to see a huge sum in brand-new bank-notes inside. The honest man at once carried his find to the police, who counted the money, which to their amazement amounted to 330,000 marks. That this fortune represents the

proceeds of a robbery is certain. The owner will no doubt communicate with the Sûreté at once ——’ Paul Grunenthal sank back in his chair, aghast — stunned. His first feeling was one of dismay at the mistake he had made. In the dark he had missed his mother’s grave — no wonder the stone had moved so easily. It was Fate — soon the discovery that the notes were faulty ones from the Reichsbank printing works, which should have been destroyed, would follow.

All his care had been in vain. Then came the agonising realisation that, even if he were not suspected, he would be a poor man once more. Emma Gotz would never love him now, and hard upon this thought followed blind, unreasoning terror. Discovery was imminent — he would be arrested — imprisoned. A groan of anguish burst from him. What could he do? Fly? And Emma, would she come with him? At that instant the bell shrilled and a knock came upon his door. Like a beast in a trap he gazed wildly about the familiar room. He heard the voice of his servant, but the words were meaningless to him; then he grasped the fact that a man wished to see Herr Grunenthal.

‘Who — who is it?’ he gasped hoarsely.

‘He said his name is Levy — he has called about a lottery ticket.’

Dazed and trembling, Grunenthal strove to collect his thoughts — suddenly the possible meaning of this unexpected visit dawned upon him. The lottery ticket — perhaps he had won a sum of money.

‘Show him in,’ he ordered; then he sat down and

wiped his clammy hands and glistening brow, where the terror of the last few moments had left its imprint. He must not seem disturbed. The door opened and the little pedlar came in. It was apparent that he had dressed himself in his best clothes for this visit and his good-natured face beamed with joy.

'Mozzil, Herr Grunenthal. Vat a lucky man you are! But a goy so generous as you deserves such luck — 330,000, think of it — 330,000 — has come up.'

Grunenthal started up violently.

'What do you mean, 330,000? So you know also? What has it to do with me?'

'Vat should it have to do with you, Herr Grunenthal? It is your ticket, mein Gott. That ganuf Meyer wanted to buy number 330,000, but I always believe in a double three and I wouldn't sell it to him — why? — because never would he give me such a commission as the noble Herr Grunenthal. Twenty thousand marks you have von in the lottery with the number 330,000. Oh, the lucky number!'

'Twenty thousand, you say?' Grunenthal whispered, sitting down suddenly — the revulsion of feeling almost robbing him of the strength to speak. So he was not yet penniless. That twenty thousand marks gave him the means for flight. But the pedlar was looking anxiously at him.

'Don't say you have lost the ticket, mein lieber Herr — you look so pale — don't tell me the precious 330,000 has gone?'

'Be quiet!' Grunenthal shouted — 'you and your

330,000 ——' Then, more gently, 'I'll give you the ticket; I have it in my desk.'

'And my commission, eh? All the way up the stairs I say to myself, "Gott, Herr Grunenthal is a gentleman, he will give me two hundred" — vat do I say? — five hundred marks commission, for the little ticket, but no — I am a chommer, I wouldn't have the chutzpah to tell him how much to give me.'

'Certainly, certainly,' said Grunenthal, coming back from his desk and handing him the slip of paper. 'Here is the ticket and you shall have a thousand marks commission.'

'A — thousand — marks! A — thousand — marks!! Never would my friends believe me if I tell them — they would say — *show me in writing*, Levy, that the noble Herr has promised you such a commission.'

Grunenthal laughed. 'All right, Levy — I understand — here — you shall have it in writing,' and he scribbled the commission note and signed it. Hardly had Levy gone, profuse in his thanks, when the bell shrilled again, but now Grunenthal was no longer nervous; what a fool he had been immediately to imagine that he would be suspected. A knock came on the door and two men entered.

'Herr Grunenthal?' they queried. He bowed. 'We are police officers and have a warrant for your arrest. Be pleased to come with us, a cab is waiting.'

'But why — why — do you arrest me?'

'You have been denounced by a Fräulein Gotz and her mother for passing counterfeit money.'

The cruel blow was too much — his Emma, the girl for whom he had sacrificed all, was the one who had informed the police. The officers had to support him, weak and sobbing, to the cab.

At the trial the chief witnesses against him were Emma Gotz and her mother, who swore that they had become suspicious of Paul Grunenthal because he always carried dozens of brand-new bank-notes in his pocket. Even then Grunenthal refused to say what he had done with the money stolen from the Reichsbank, and insisted that the dresses and jewels which he had presented to the girl were bought with sums won at the races and on the stock exchange.

He was sentenced to fifteen years' hard labour. Whilst he was being conducted up the winding stairs leading from the court to the cells, Paul Grunenthal wrenched himself free from the two warders and with the heartrending cry, 'God forgive you, Emma!' he vaulted over the rail and crashed head first to the ground. He died instantly.

But retribution awaited the heartless girl that very night. It was Heinrich Lange, who had already spent several years in prison, who first suspected that quite possibly there might be a connection between the suddenly acquired wealth of Grunenthal and his former position in the Reichsbank. He had kept a close watch on the ex-official with the intention of blackmailing him, and was thus at hand as fourteenth guest on the night when he saw Emma Gotz for the first time. He had noted the splendid jewellery the girl wore and decided that



this wealth should also be his. Fate had played into his hands; for the girl, obeying hereditary instincts, immediately fell in love with him. The mother had listened greedily the next day, when he warned her that the money Grunenthal spent so lavishly was probably stolen, and that they had better obtain all they could at once, before the police stepped in. It was this friendly chat which Grunenthal had suddenly interrupted, but the lost bag had come as a useful explanation. Lange had then entered the flat of Paul Grunenthal, and but for the sudden attack, which caught him unprepared, would have carried out his intention of taking all the money and then abducting the girl, in order to rob her of her jewellery. When Grunenthal had spared his life, Lange immediately hurried to the mother, Frau Gotz, and warned her that, if she did not wish to be suspected of complicity, she must at once inform the police that her daughter's admirer was a counterfeiter. The girl, who was utterly depraved, agreed to this also. During the trial she confided in Lange that she had received five thousand pounds in English railway bonds from Grunenthal, of which her mother knew nothing. By doing this she signed her death warrant.

On the night of the tragic suicide of Grunenthal, Lange entered the apartment where the two women still resided. Emma Gotz surprised him whilst he was breaking open the safe in her boudoir and, not recognising the dim figure, fired at him with the revolver Grunenthal had given her. The shot went wide, but Lange sprang at the girl in blind rage and

drove a knife into her heart. Then he calmly opened the safe and escaped with money, bonds, and jewellery. It was when he attempted to sell some of the latter that he was captured.

Some months later, Lange was tried and sentenced to death. Another result of the trial was that Frau Gotz, who was now in sole possession of all the wealth that Grunenthal had showered on the daughter, was forced to return everything to the Reichsbank, and became once more 'old mother Latsche, the paper-seller.'

Heinrich Lange died a coward. Struggling and praying for mercy, he was forced to his knees before the wooden block, but in his terror he managed to twist away as the executioner swung his axe and a second blow was necessary to end his ignoble life.

Thus Fate meted out punishment to all the actors in this truly human drama — but I still feel sorry for the foolish if sinful Paul Grunenthal.

3

EPISODE VI  
THE DEATH PLANES  
A STORY OF THE FIRST AËRIAL PAGEANT  
AT RHEIMS, 1909



## EPISODE VI

### THE DEATH PLANES

#### A STORY OF THE FIRST AËRIAL PAGEANT AT RHEIMS, 1909

I NEVER tire of taking a trip to Croydon, where I love to watch the huge winged monsters of modern science come and go. Farmans, Daimlers, Graham Whites, and slim Dutch monoplanes, driven by their bellowing, roaring engines, soar into the air, with their fuselages filled with comfortably seated passengers, or alight, like giant dragon-flies, after describing a graceful circle over the aerodrome, in order to land against the wind.

Then I shut my eyes and let my thoughts drift back to that modest beginning, so dim and far away already in the memory of man; although in truth the earth since then has spun but twenty times along its sun-lit path. I think of that lean, spare American with the dome-like head and deeply furrowed face — Wilbur Wright; and that other American, quick, alert, and active, Glenn Curtiss; and I thrill with delight at the memory of the time when I called them both friends; when I sat as passenger and as amateur pilot in their splendid rudimentary machines, children of long years of patient labour, driven by puny twenty horse-power engines, when every sudden breath of wind was an enemy and Death sang his song in the humming, vibrating



struts. These men, the famous men, who achieve things become strange, superhuman almost, with the passing of time, as though they stood on pinnacles — alone. They slip gradually into the remote yesterday and lose their human kinship — somehow. It is difficult to imagine such men eating and drinking and perhaps even losing their tempers — as we do. Yet those who knew them, remember them best as just — men.

Between 1906 and 1908 the world awoke to the certainty that the hope of mankind so long deferred had been realized at last. In France, a small syndicate was formed by three men, far-seeing and enterprising, in order to persuade Wilbur Wright to come to Le Mans, a little provincial town, near which was the vast motor-car factory of one of them, Léon Bollée, and prove once and for all that he could fly.

The other two were Lazare Weiller, of the Astra balloon factory, and an American, Mr. Hart O. Berg.

Monsieur Letellier, the owner of the great Paris daily, 'Le Journal,' sent one of his editors, Mr. Fordyce, to Dayton — and the matter was quickly arranged. I was fortunate enough to be very friendly with Mr. Hart O. Berg and so it came about that I was chosen to stay at the Camp d'Auvours where Wilbur Wright established his hangars. I was present at the various experimental flights, when no one had thought of mounting the Wright plane on wheels, and when to start on a flight it was necessary for a dozen men to lift it on a rail, from which it was projected much as a stone from a catapult —

by a rope, pulleys, and a dropping weight. Because of my good luck in being chosen by Monsieur Dufresne and Mr. Hart O. Berg to be present officially at the series of flights at Le Mans, I was also sent to the first aërial pageant the world ever saw in 1909 at Rheims. Thus, then, I am able to relate the story of that crazy inventor, Dorinsky, who, because his flying machine, the Hawk, was rejected first by the British Government and then by the French, became a monomaniac and allied himself with a group of fanatics, anarchists, led by a wealthy Russian woman, Catherine Nastera. Many, I am sure, remember that wonderful series of contests called 'La Grande Semaine d'Aviation' which was held in Rheims. They will also remember that the first days were saddened by a number of accidents and deaths, mysterious and inexplicable. That these were the result of plans long matured by cowardly assassins and carried out by their poor deluded accomplices, has been kept a secret until to-day. This group of anarchists called themselves 'The Liberators' and their password was 'Liberty.' They hoped to possess themselves of a terrible new weapon which they intended to turn against organised humanity and above all against the hated rulers. By destroying both the pioneers of the new science and their machines, they thought to succeed in delaying for years the development of flying; whilst they successfully continued their warfare against society by its means.

Catherine Nastera was a beautiful woman and a

wealthy one. Her sudden but ephemeral popularity in Paris society was due to both these reasons. She was a young widow, whose husband had owned vast tracts of forest land and several mines in czarist Russia. Now she appeared not unwilling to listen to the wooing of a well-known French politician, and the brilliant fêtes which she gave at her house in the Avenue du Bois were honoured several times by the President himself. Lions of the hour, musicians, poets, and inventors were always to be met there, and so it was natural that Paul Dorinsky, who had lately been besieging the Government offices in London and Paris, should also drift to this house.

Dorinsky was born in England of Polish parents. He had spent many years perfecting his model and now sought capital wherewith to build a machine large enough to accommodate a pilot. The model was shown several times in the gardens of Madame Nastera, gliding a few yards with flapping wings; but experts declared it hopeless. The man, a burly beetle-browed fellow of evil temper who could not brook the least criticism of his work, first came under our notice, because, unable to find any one who would invest money in his invention, he turned in his rage to a very well-known group of fanatic anarchists, who were constantly giving the police trouble. We knew that men who hated the world because they were failures, were always welcome there, and their smouldering hatred was adroitly fanned into flame for their own ends.

One day all Paris was startled to learn that an attempt had been made to blow up the Danton, one

of the newest French battleships then lying at Toulon. The explosion of a complicated bomb in one of the engine-rooms had caused the death of several sailors. The bomb had exploded prematurely, also killing the man, one of the crew, who was trying to place it where it would certainly have sunk the ship.

The investigation traced the plot to its source in Paris, but failed to obtain sufficient evidence for arrests. A few days later, whilst the French President was travelling to Versailles by railway, a bomb was discovered — just in time — on the rails over which the train passed a few minutes later. This time the men responsible for the outrage were caught red-handed and several arrests followed. It was then that suspicion began to focus itself on the charming Catherine Nastera. Unbelievable as it at first appeared, letters were discovered which led us to believe that this society butterfly had been caught in the net of the fanatics who were known as 'The Liberators' and that her great wealth was being used for advancing the cause of anarchy. Before sufficient proof of this was available, however, she suddenly fled, and with her went Dorinsky. It was the search of the house in the Avenue du Bois, after Madame Nastera had disappeared, which caused us to fear that a serious attack might be made against airmen and machines during the coming meeting, where all the pilots of the various countries would be assembled.

A letter in cypher was decoded, which came from the head of the Liberator group in Russia. From this it appeared that not only Russia, but another

country was interested in checkmating the progress of British, French, and American aviation, for they were at that time the only countries far enough advanced in this science.

Rheims, the Champagne city, was crowded with men and women, come from all parts of the world to witness that marvel, a host of men and machines, who were going to compete for speed, altitude, and endurance in that newly conquered element, the air. Naturally, where such a huge cosmopolitan crowd assembled, the international crooks were certain to reap a rich harvest, and the Sûreté had sent several of its specialists to the scene. Men who knew by sight the light-fingered tribe; those who dealt with the confidence tricksters; and others who for years had waged constant warfare against the plausible young men and women who specialise in black-mail. My department was kept busy comparing snapshots of elegant youths and maidens with other less pleasing photographs in our possession: full-face and profile portraits taken by the prison photographer of the same originals, minus collar and tie, or with the hair not quite so beautifully waved, and under which were measurements, finger-prints, and other particulars.

I myself had already been ordered to go to Rheims, several days before the opening of the aerodrome to the public, on special work.

It was feared that even if the anarchists, finding themselves ceaselessly watched, should abandon their plans, the magnificent prizes offered to the



winners in various contests and the tremendous betting which would naturally ensue might tempt others, acting independently, to tamper with the machines, thus causing the death of pilots and mechanics. One of the Paris Sûreté inspectors, Rousseau (the Brigadier) was also there. He was to protect the fitters and helpers against plausible men, too free with drinks, of which the purity could not always be guaranteed. So, as always, heroism and cowardly greed marched abreast. Rousseau was one of the most astute officers of the special investigation department. He and I were old friends and always helped each other. There was never any question of professional jealousy between us, for we belonged to totally different branches of criminal investigation.

We soon had proof that our fears for the intrepid airmen were well founded. The day before the official opening of the Grande Semaine d'Aviation, Delagrange, who was experimenting with a monoplane of the Blériot type, suddenly crashed and completely capsized. Luckily he was not badly hurt. The machine was at once examined, and it was seen that the controls to the horizontal rudder, which were then above the pilot's seat, had snapped most unaccountably. They were strong enough normally to withstand a strain ten times as great as that which the tiny machine exerted on them. A further examination convinced us that someone had maliciously cut a number of the wire strands. The remainder had parted at the sudden straightening out before landing. Every hangar was now carefully

watched. Our difficulty was that this had to be done without arousing the suspicions of the airmen and their assistants and without letting anything become known to the representatives of the press, for we desired above all to avoid alarming either the pilots or the public. Flying was then quite dangerous enough, without adding to it the strain and fear of foul play. Rousseau and I spent the evening patrolling the camps and chatting with the mechanics, who were all tremendously excited at the coming contests. We hoped that with so many men at work it would be almost impossible for any to carry out their cowardly attempts unseen.

Yet towards midnight I heard a sudden commotion and shouting from the sheds where the Wright planes were sheltered. Running towards them, I saw dense smoke and flames pouring from the first one. In a moment all was confusion — crowds surrounded the burning shed and the fire brigade stationed on the field rushed one of its engines along. The plane — one of the five machines sent by the Wright Syndicate — was completely destroyed. Inspector Rousseau, who had been in that part of the field, told me later that he saw a dark shape at work on the door of the shed. At his sharp challenge the man, whose face he did not see, ran away. He was about to give the alarm when the fire broke out. In the ensuing tumult the fellow had escaped.

The next day was the first of the memorable six, never to be forgotten by those who were there. Its close was to be saddened by two tragedies.

The aviation ground was an immense flat meadow.

Along one side of it was the grandstand and the tiers of seats for the spectators. At right angles to these ran a long lane, fenced off from the ground where the flying was to take place, by wooden palings and barbed wire.

In this lane, like a row of dwellings, were the numerous camps side by side. The first hangars as one entered belonged to the Antoinette Company whose monoplanes were expected to gain many prizes. The crack pilot of this camp was Latham, who failed to fly the Channel by only a few hundred yards, falling into the water almost in Dover Harbour. The next camp was that of Monsieur Blériot. He succeeded, as everyone knows, where poor Latham failed.

All the great ones of aviation were residents in that lane, and amongst them Farman, Breguet, Delagrangé, and Glenn Curtiss, looking strangely commonplace in their dirty and oily blue overalls and knitted woollen caps.

The first mishap occurred when Blériot attempted to take off. Propeller after propeller snapped at the hub, the whirling blades flying high into the air. One of these seriously wounded Blériot in the arm and he had to retire from the field. During the day fresh propellers arrived from Paris, and were, by our orders, placed under the guard of two men. Every one of those which had snapped had been tampered with. Then came the tragedy.

One of the Wright machines, piloted by Jules Varennes, a pupil of Wilbur himself, suddenly dived, whilst over some spectators standing outside the

grounds. One blade of the twin screws struck a young girl, killing her instantly, and the machine crashed to the ground. Jules Varennes was picked up tenderly by his horrified comrades. It was evident that he could live only a few minutes. But before he died, he told us, in gasping sentences, that one of the chains running from the engine to his two propellers had snapped suddenly — unaccountably — causing him to lose control. This chain was found in the wreckage and *it had been filed*.

Who was the evil creature responsible for these crimes? Carefully the Brigadier and I questioned the pilots. Together we went over the list of men — helpers, cleaners, and mechanics; all were old and trusted employees. None of these could be suspected of such vile deeds. That it was the beginning of the organised scheme to wreck the planes and end the contests we now felt certain. Plain-clothes officers constantly patrolled the grounds, and all strangers, even press-men and photographers, were carefully watched. No one who did not belong to the camps was allowed in the enclosure after the public left.

Yet again the next day a machine, a Voisin bi-plane, piloted by Lecouturier, suddenly crumpled up and crashed, killing the pilot. The machine was wrecked so completely that no investigation was possible, yet instinct warned us that it had been no accident. That evening Rousseau asked me to come with him. He believed that at last he had made some progress. A young fitter, who had been in the Astra Company's employ for only a few weeks, but

who had possessed excellent references and letters of recommendation from several well-known firms, was in the habit of spending his evenings in town. The Brigadier had followed him twice and had been surprised to see him drinking in expensive taverns, where he appeared to be on a footing of equality with several fashionably dressed men and women. One of our agents reported that this young fellow, who was known as Raoul Fréjus, spent large sums every evening which were not in keeping with his salary.

His friends had been followed to their hotels. Here nothing much was known about them, except that they were not French and that they possessed ample means. The only thing which might be considered suspicious was that they often sat in a group away from everyone and appeared to be discussing something with great animation.

‘Alors,’ said Rousseau as we got out of the car which had taken us from the aviation ground to Rheims itself, ‘I sent their description at once to your department; also some very pretty photographs and finger-prints which my men obtained.’

‘Already?’ I said.

‘But yes — we have been busy. They have all given up visiting-cards or have been handed something to look at — you know the method?’

I laughed. ‘Yes, I know it, but you have only lately employed it.’

‘True, but I always try to learn. I showed young Raoul a photograph of a machine, which he returned to me with a lovely oily thumb-mark on it — for



which he apologised' — and the Brigadier chuckled. 'But it is no laughing matter,' he went on. 'One of the men — the one who seems to have much to say to this Raoul Fréjus — is known at headquarters. He lived for some time in one of the allotments of that crazy millionaire anarchist Fromentin. He is a Pole, and believed to have been concerned in that outrage at Toulon, when the Danton was nearly blown up. You see — always he fights against progress!'

'You don't include battleships in your scheme of "progress," do you?' I asked.

The Brigadier waved his hand angrily. 'Bien — I know your ideas, don't let us argue about it — you are half an anarchist yourself, *ma foi*! Now here is the Lion d'Or. Let us go in separately. We shall find Raoul here.'

We entered a brightly lit café with an American bar running along one side of it. Here I saw the young mechanic whom Rousseau had described to me; he was flashily dressed and appeared flushed and slightly intoxicated. A dark, brutish man, with overhanging, bushy black eyebrows, was talking angrily to him. It was Dorinsky! He had shaved off his moustache, but there was no mistaking those simian features. Dorinsky, who had disappeared together with Catherine Nastera. Was she in Rheims too? I felt that we should soon be at grips with the leaders responsible for the outrages at the aerodrome. Neither Dorinsky nor she would suspect that we knew of their intentions and they would therefore feel quite safe.

Dorinsky ceased talking as I approached, but I had heard the young fellow's reply. They were speaking Russian. I lifted my hat and wiped my brow with a handkerchief — the signal agreed upon for the Brigadier to wait outside; then paying for my drink I joined him leisurely.

'Quick!' I said. 'You are right. That is the crazy inventor Dorinsky; they are speaking Russian. Get Chaumet, of the mobile brigade; he is here — staying at the Hôtel de la Cathédrale — he speaks Russian. We must not lose sight of these two. I will wait here. If they leave, I will follow them until they stop somewhere again. You must wait if I have gone when you return. I will come or send for you.'

'Bien,' grunted Rousseau, going at once.

I could watch the two men through the big plate-glass front. Almost at once they climbed down from their high stools and approached the door. On their way they passed a group of men and women sitting at a table, and I saw the older man say a few sharp words to them in passing. Then I had to hide in a doorway as they came out. Together they walked towards the square where the theatre is situated. The young man appeared to be very much the worse for drink, for he staggered several times. Then they turned sharply down a narrow street and disappeared in the shadows. I crossed quickly to the opposite side and listened for their footsteps. They were still walking, so I slipped from doorway to doorway on the other side. It is difficult to follow anyone when a street is deserted. I saw them stop

before a large house and enter; one of them must have possessed a key, for they did not ring.

Taking note of the house, I ran back to the Lion d'Or. Alone I could do nothing. Rousseau and Chaumet were already waiting and with them were several of their colleagues and two local Sûreté officers. These informed us, when I told them where the house was which the two men had entered, that it had been empty and to let for a long time, but had been taken a month ago by a lady from Paris, who appeared to be both respectable and wealthy. That this lady would turn out to be the former society favourite Madame Nastera, I felt certain, and said as much to Rousseau.

For some minutes we discussed how we might best enter the house without alarming the occupants. One of the local inspectors suggested that we might attempt it from the back. We could gain the roof of the house and thus possibly the interior. All these houses, he told us, had servants' rooms at the top, with windows in the sloping roof; in front of these windows there was a ledge broad enough for a man to walk along.

This we decided was the best thing to do. Several officers were stationed in front and one at each end of the street. They would warn their colleagues if someone else came and could prevent anyone from escaping. Then Rousseau, Chaumet, and I went to the house at the back, from which we climbed to the roof. It was no easy matter to clamber up the smooth surface without making a noise or dislodging any of the loose slates. However, we accom-

plished it at last. The descent towards the front was even worse, for we had not thought to obtain a rope and we had to let ourselves slip, trusting to the ledge at the bottom to stop us from falling into the street. We were all glad when we reached the windows and found that this ledge was really there. The Brigadier wiped his face and hands with a huge handkerchief which fluttered in the night breeze like a flag.

‘Once, mes enfants,’ he growled, ‘but not twice. Papa Rousseau is too old for mountaineering.’

Neither Chaumet nor I replied. That awful slide in the dark, with a sixty-foot drop to the street, had shaken us both pretty badly. Feeling our way slowly and carefully, since it turned out that none of us had a pocket lamp, we found a window which was not fastened. This we opened, and, after making sure by the light of a match that nothing likely to fall stood in the way, we dropped to the floor. Each, I remember, gave a sigh of relief.

The room contained only an iron bedstead and was not used, for there was no mattress. The door was locked from the outside and the key in the lock. Such things as locks never troubled the Brigadier, however. Asking me to light a match, he pulled a beautiful little tool from his pocket, a slender pair of pliers with a long hollow beak, which just fitted and gripped the end of the key, so that he was able to turn it from inside and unlock the door. We filed out on tiptoe and slowly crept down the stairs, stepping near the wall, where the steps would be least likely to creak. As we reached the first floor — where we

saw a light shining from an open room and heard the murmur of conversation — a key grated in the street door. A moment later came a confused babble of voices, the slam of the door, and the stamping of several feet; then a woman's voice called out in French, 'La Liberté.'

From the open door in front of us came the reply, 'Montez. I am waiting for you.'

We crouched down in the shadows and waited. Two men and a woman came up the stairs and passed through the doorway into the room from which the man had called. I gripped the Brigadier by the arm as the light shone for an instant on her face. It was Catherine Nastera. Then began a loud conversation in Russian. Chaumet crept slowly forward and listened. A growling voice, that of Dorinsky, was speaking rapidly. After a few moments Chaumet returned to us and whispered:

'These are the people responsible for the deaths at the aerodrome. All are not here, however. He mentioned a Michael and another whom he called the master and who are both at the aviation grounds. Some plan, already discussed previously, is to be carried out to-night. But there seems to be trouble with the youngster; he is unwilling to help further.'

'I will go down,' said the Brigadier, 'and let in our men outside; then we will arrest these five and — bon Dieu — they shall tell us where those other two are hiding. The *master* — eh? What a haul, mes enfants!'

To this we agreed. Rousseau was already nearing the door when the woman Catherine came out of the



room and switched on the hall light. We instantly flattened ourselves against the wall, but too late, she had seen us. As Chaumet sprang towards her, she gave a wild cry of warning. The Brigadier rushed to the street door and blew his whistle, whilst we, ignoring the woman, ran into the room. We saw four men, and one of them was the youth we knew as Fréjus. Although taken by surprise, they had no intention of surrendering. In an instant chairs and tables were overturned while pistols cracked. Chaumet staggered and fell to the ground and I received a blow in the face from Dorinsky as he dashed to the door. Rousseau and the others were now crowding up the stairs and, with a howl of rage at sight of them, the fellow tried to gain the next floor. Two officers at once gave chase, whilst we quickly covered the three in the room. We were about to disarm them when the man Fréjus snatched a pistol from one of his companions and, placing it to his breast, pulled the trigger. The other two were safely handcuffed. A terrific struggle was taking place meanwhile on the stairs. We were about to go to the assistance of our colleagues when a shrill cry in a woman's voice pealed out.

'Death to all of us!' she screamed in French, and instantly a fearful explosion shook the house, throwing everyone to the ground. Fortunately the bomb she had hurled at the men on the stairs had been badly aimed and crashed against the bannisters, exploding there.

Some of us were badly bruised and Dorinsky was wounded by a splinter. The woman herself was

killed by the fall from the second floor to the hall, where the explosion had hurled her. A cordon of police at once closed the street to the curious and prevented anyone from reaching the house.

A gas explosion, the reporters were told, and so it was described in the papers the next day. The young man Fréjus, who had shot himself, was dying. A doctor was sent for in haste. Poor Chaumet was dead — a bullet had pierced his brain. I held the dying man's head on my knee, while the Brigadier wrote down his gasping words.

He had become an anarchist some years ago when he was working in Russia. The group to which he was sent was very powerful, and disposed of unlimited capital, although he did not know who supplied it. Their leader was never called by his name, but was known as 'the master.' He had never seen him. Lately he had been sent to France and ordered to report to the woman Madame Nastera. The object of the association was the destruction of all existing governments and their password, 'Liberty and the People.'

Agents all over the world bribed and corrupted those who could aid them in destroying railways, ships, factories, and buildings. All that made for organised progress. He had been sent with several others to learn all there was then known about flying. Forged letters of recommendation had been supplied to everyone. When it was known that all the leaders of aviation were to meet at Rheims and demonstrate the results of their untiring research and experiments, orders had been given to himself

and several others to retard the inevitable development of aviation by destroying the machines and terrorising the airmen. It was hoped that a series of fatal accidents, due to purposely weakened parts, would put an end to the contests. Then, when all was chaos, several machines were to be stolen and hidden, to form the nucleus of an aerial fleet capable of dropping explosives on public buildings and palaces. Plans of the best machines were also to be obtained by bribing the draughtsmen or by theft.

Gasping and strangling in his efforts to speak quickly, he urged us to go at once to the aviation ground — that night several machines were to be stolen and all the hangars fired. The master himself — the head of the Russian group — was there, working in one of the camps as a mechanic. The deaths which had occurred had so horrified Fréjus that this evening he had refused to help further.

Begging the doctor to do what he could for him, the Brigadier and I ordered a police car to be fetched, and drove at once to the grounds. Here all was quiet and we saw that a good watch was being kept. Latham himself came out when we knocked at the door of the first shed. In a few hurried words I explained to him what we feared. We intended to rouse all the sleeping camps in order to prevent a surprise. He at once hurried away to wake his own men.

Dawn was just breaking, and we hoped when we saw this that no attempt would be made against the hangars that night. A few hours more and we could definitely checkmate the crazy plans of these

fanatics. Suddenly I gripped the Brigadier by the arm — a big biplane was being wheeled from its shed. Abruptly its motor awoke to roaring, snarling life, and almost at once, the machine bumped and rushed over the ground. From the Voisin sheds men came running just as the plane lifted and took the air. Behind us I heard Latham shouting. The Brigadier turned and I saw that an Antoinette monoplane was coming from its shelter. I grasped their purpose. The first man-hunt by air.

The Wright sheds were close by, and I ran to the nearest and hammered at the door. Count Laperre, one of Wilbur Wright's first pilots, was there. While I was explaining in a few words what had happened, I saw the Brigadier clamber into the Antoinette with Latham, and the mechanic begin to swing the propeller. Luckily a Wright plane was on its rail — ready. The Count and I took our seats, the signal was given, and the huge dropping weight pulled our machine forward. We rose almost simultaneously with the monoplane. In front of us, already far away, was the stolen Voisin, flying beautifully in the calm air of the dawn. Behind us I could see the 'lane' waking up, as the news spread that a race, as everyone at first thought, was in progress.

No one who has not flown one of these ancient types can imagine the constant attention which they required. There were so many things to go wrong. On the Wright plane, the edge of the wings was warped to maintain a balance which was as unstable as that of a bicycle ridden by a beginner. The warping was controlled by a wooden lever acting on taut

wires. Then there were the numerous bearings over which rushed the long bicycle chains, which crossed and drove the twin propellers. Pilots of to-day, just imagine it, bicycle chains several yards long! There were no springs nor shock-absorbers under us: a bump was a bump, and generally final. Stevenson's Puffing Billy and a great up-to-date express locomotive are a hundred times more akin than those first machines and a modern plane.

The Antoinette was drawing away from us, though we rushed at a good forty miles an hour through the air some fifty feet from the ground. At first it seemed as if we could not gain very much on the biplane, but little by little I saw that the distance was lessening. Soon I heard shots from where the Brigadier sat behind Latham. Now to my chagrin the motor of the Antoinette began to miss. For a few minutes Latham tried hard to keep going, then I saw him dip to land. As we passed, he struck the ground in a sliding rush and one of his wings crumpled and ripped, tearing up the ground.

But the Voisin, too, was having trouble. Twice I saw it sway from side to side, then suddenly it dived and crashed, and a blaze of light shot from its wreckage into the air. Count Laperre did not lose his head, fortunately, but made a beautiful landing, only smashing one of the runners in his haste. Scrambling out, we dashed to the burning Voisin. Two men were lying amongst the wreckage. At great risk to ourselves we managed to drag them clear just as the Brigadier and Latham came running up. One was dead and the other died as we



lifted him. In his pockets we found a large sum in foreign bank-notes and gold, also several documents, amongst which was a letter bearing the postmark of the day before and containing instructions for the placing of incendiary bombs in all the hangars.

When we returned to Rheims, we found that three more of the organisation had been caught as they were leaving by train.

From these we learned that the leader, the man known as the master had fled in a powerful car upon hearing of the explosion in the house where Catherine Nastera had died. He, at any rate, knew that it was not a gas explosion.

Telephone messages and telegrams were at once sent to all the towns and villages on the departmental roads, with orders to stop and search all cars. Rousseau and I, with two men from headquarters, at once drove at full speed to Paris. We were just in time to be present at the raiding of the house in the Avenue du Bois. We had believed this to be empty after the flight of its owner. The Sûreté had its suspicions aroused by the various indications discovered when the arrested men were searched; it was surrounded and entered by a squad of armed men. In the basement and cellars we found a number of weapons, ammunition, bombs, and explosives, also several men and women, who had taken refuge there upon learning of the failure of their plans. It was evident that the master had stopped in Paris on his way out of France and given the alarm.

Shortly after we arrived, a message came from Fontainebleau, telling us that a powerful Mercédès

had passed through at terrific speed. It contained three passengers and the driver. It had taken the road leading towards the Swiss frontier. Although weary and exhausted, we continued the chase. Early in the afternoon near Troyes we came upon the car, which had smashed into a tree and was wrecked. The chauffeur was lying doubled up in his seat dead. The steering-wheel had crushed his chest. Beside the car was another man, whose legs had been hurt by the accident; he was bleeding from a bullet wound in his breast. He told us later that the leader, upon seeing that he could not walk, and afraid that he might be induced to indicate which way the remaining two had gone, had callously shot him. Evidently this ferocious brute thought that he was dead, but the bullet, which had been aimed at the heart, had been deflected by a metal cigarette-case. Under our vigorous ministrations the wounded man revived sufficiently to tell us that Paul Nerinsky, 'the master,' had also been injured in one of his legs and could only hobble; that therefore he could not be far away. I saw his eyes gleam with hatred when at his request we told him the time. 'Only an hour has passed since the accident,' he exclaimed 'and he cannot walk fast. Something went wrong with the steering-wheel and our driver lost control. Oh, let me see you catch him — the fiend! He laughed when he fired at me.'

We left one of the officers to look after the man while we reconnoitred the neighbourhood. Not far away was a small farmhouse. There we came upon the other two unexpectedly. They had gagged and

bound the farmer and his wife, and were about to leave dressed as farmhands. One of them surrendered at once, but the other, Nerinsky, a horrible little hunchback with the face of a bird of prey, tried to run. When he saw that escape was impossible, he placed the muzzle of a pistol to his head and collapsed dead.

So ended this mad attempt to bar the road to human progress. There were no more mishaps at Rheims during the days that followed, as everyone knows. We had captured all the members of 'The Liberators' in France. Most of them were sent to the penal settlements for life. Dorinsky became insane and is still in an asylum.

Some days later, when I had returned to my work in Paris, I received a cable from Wilbur Wright, congratulating and thanking me for what I had done and of which he had learned from Count Laperre.

The story of this gigantic plot was never told to the public, since relations with the other country involved were already strained, and it was thought best not to make matters worse. Their representative was the man Nerinsky tried to kill, when the *Mercédès* was wrecked. He died in a prison hospital.

## EPISODE VII

ALLIVI: THE BOGUS DEATH RAY





## EPISODE VII

### ALLIVI

#### THE BOGUS DEATH RAY

WHENEVER I think of Mario Allivi — handsome, gay, cynical, and clever Mario — I see in imagination the last act of ‘Rigoletto,’ where the duke, escaping the cruel net of hatred and conspiracy drawn tightly around him, walks laughingly away, a woman on his arm, and the song — oh, supreme irony — ‘*La donna è mobile*,’<sup>1</sup> trilling like a pæan of triumph from his lips; for Mario, too, master of intrigue, laughed at the detectives of France, America, and Italy and disappeared carrying with him the woman who rescued him from the clutches of the law.

Ah, well, Bannister and I often laugh also, thanking Heaven for a sense of humour. The picture of three grave representatives of rich and powerful countries fooled like so many schoolboys, is irresistibly funny, and the last touch is the memory of the fierce Italian detective rattling his mediæval handcuffs and searching the woods, accompanied by two picturesque, gaudy ‘carabinieri,’ whilst debonair Mario was well on his way to America with the bride of his choice!

‘*Absit invidia.*’

I had been working very hard lately and was glad when the moment arrived for my summer holidays.

<sup>1</sup> Woman is fickle.

There was no definite date fixed for them, for, if a serious case cropped up, the whole summer might pass by before I found time to escape from Paris and its stifling atmosphere of asphalt and dust. In a general way, however, I was permitted to forget that such things as murderers and thieves existed during June and July. This year I had planned to visit the Lombardi lakes. A few days before my departure I was invited by Monsieur Dufresne to a dinner given in honour of an Italian colleague, Signor Lanfranchi. I had been chatting for some time with this famous detective and chief of the Milanese 'Questura,' when Monsieur Dufresne came and sat down beside me with a queer smile.

'Were you not planning to spend your vacation in the South?' he asked after a moment.

'Yes,' I replied. 'I have been telling Signor Lanfranchi that I intend to cross from Switzerland to Italy on foot, over the Simplon Pass.'

Monsieur Dufresne nodded sympathetically. 'Une belle promenade — but you will have to do that inversely coming back, I am afraid. Call in tomorrow at the office, I have something to tell you.'

I must have looked very disappointed, for he added, 'Oh, you'll have your holiday in Italy nevertheless.'

The next morning I called on Monsieur Dufresne as he had requested. I found an enormously stout man with him, who was evidently a terrible sufferer from asthma, for the room was filled with the pungent fumes of stromonium and I saw that a preparation of this drug was sizzling and burning in

a jar on the table. Monsieur Dufresne introduced him as Monsieur Saillard, chief engineer of the Whitehead torpedo factory at San Tropez on the Mediterranean. Without further preliminaries the chief of the Paris Sûreté explained that Monsieur Saillard was interested in the invention of a young Italian named Mario Allivi, who claimed to have discovered a mysterious ray by means of which torpedoes and mines could be exploded at a distance of several miles. The famous firm which Monsieur Saillard represented had empowered him to acquire this invention after a satisfactory demonstration. The inventor had insisted on the payment of a sum of money as guarantee of good faith and in order to be able to construct his model.

This money Monsieur Saillard had already sent to Allivi. He was now going to Italy to test the apparatus, for which he was to pay several million francs if it proved efficient. Certain private enquiries regarding this Mario Allivi had caused him to feel uneasy, and he had requested Monsieur Dufresne, who was a distant relation, to place someone at his disposal who spoke Italian perfectly and who would accompany him in order to protect him against fraud.

‘You understand,’ Monsieur Dufresne concluded, ‘you are free to refuse, for I cannot send you officially. We cannot interfere with what an Italian does on Italian territory — that is for the Questura to see to; and I have spoken to Signor Lanfranchi, who returns to Milan to-day, but this gentleman here is my good friend and you would oblige me by

accepting. Besides, you were going to Italy and this investigation need not interfere much with your holiday. You will travel with Monsieur Saillard as his interpreter and receive a handsome fee. What do you say?’

‘Even without the added inducement of the fee, I shall be only too glad to help,’ I replied.

‘Very well, *mon ami*, then be ready to leave in two days. You had better travel by the seventy-three express train from the Gare de Lyon. My friend will meet you at the Hôtel Regina at Stresa and you will continue to Como together, for the experiments are to take place there.’

I was swallowing a hasty dinner in the buffet of the P.L.M. railway station, determined to forget all about mystery rays and to enjoy the journey to Lake Maggiore, when to my astonishment I heard a well-known voice at the table behind me say in a lazy, Western drawl:

‘Well, Mr. Jennings, I’d think more of this fellow Allivi and his machine if he were not so slick in obtaining money before he has shown what he can do.’

‘So should I,’ I replied, leaning over the leather division and holding out my hand with a smile; ‘you’ve put your finger on the weak spot, Bannister. But what are you doing in this *galère*?’

‘Good Heavens!’ Bannister exclaimed, jumping up and gripping my hand. ‘Come round, come round, we are just having dinner. This is Ezra P. Jennings, of the American & Continental Trust Company.’ Then, after introducing me to a lean,

tall, thin-lipped American, he continued, 'We are off to Como — on — well, it seems you know why: and thereby hangs a tale, eh?'

I ordered the waiter to move my meal to my friend's table and sat down. I did not feel at liberty to mention my errand before a stranger, and Bannister appeared to be in the same boat, but the man Jennings decided for us.

He began, looking shrewdly from one to the other: 'I'd best put my cards on the table, then perhaps I'll learn something worth while. I am acting as agent only, but I'm responsible for the money already paid. I've acquired the option for a certain invention and given a big sum for that option. We are off now to see the invention demonstrated before buying it. My friend Bannister has been instructed by his boss in New York to come with me to see I'm not swindled: now what can you add to that?'

'I am also going, in the same capacity for another gentleman, of a different nationality, who has also paid a certain sum for that same invention.'

Bannister nodded; then he poured out a glass of wine for each of us, saying: 'Well here's to a pleasant trip. We travel together, I suppose; it may be that this Italian has an invention to sell and wants to make sure of a buyer; if not — well, I guess between the two of us we can trip him up.'

We arranged to meet at Como at the Hôtel du Lac, but as strangers, since thus we should more easily discover any trickery, by secretly comparing notes. I decided not to mention to Monsieur Sailard that Ezra Jennings was also a buyer. I found



the latter waiting for me at the Hôtel Regina, where he at once introduced me to a tall, slender Italian, Signor Allivi, the inventor of the ray. Mario Allivi was the handsomest man I have ever met. Dark, with curly black hair and classic features, such as one sees on Roman statuary, his broad brow denoted the intellectual, and his charming smile was frank and disarming. In fact, I liked Allivi at once, and I felt sure that every woman must inevitably fall in love with the man. So I imagine the hero of 'La Tosca,' that other Mario, must have looked. With him was a tall, pleasant girl of the Sicilian type whom he introduced as his fiancée, Eleonora Fiori; the name suited her. While Allivi talked with the vivacity and natural fluency of utterance given to so many of his race, I saw that her eyes were fixed on him with an expression of adoration, but the flash of her black eyes and the curl of her lips when her lover's gaze unconsciously followed some more than usually attractive woman amongst the fashionable crowd thronging the hall warned me that Mario would do well to wear a steel doublet if he intended to trifle with others.

Monsieur Saillard was anxious to see the invention he had come to buy demonstrated as soon as possible, so we left the next morning. I suggested that Signor Allivi should take the train to Milan via Arona, and then continue from there by train to Como, which would give him time to prepare his apparatus, whilst we travelled by the lake steamer to Luino, Lugano, and Como, a longer but more pleasant way. In reality I had no intention of doing anything of the

kind. Mario — I love to call him by that picturesque name — came to the landing-stage and saw us embark. At Laveno I left the boat, after explaining my intention to Monsieur Saillard, and, hiring a car at a garage, drove through Varese straight to Como. In this way I reached there two hours before Allivi could arrive by train, even if for once the easy-going 'direttissimo' were not hours late, as it generally is. I found Bannister and Jennings already installed at the Hôtel du Lac. I suggested that both Bannister and I should go to a smaller place near by, thus apparently leaving Jennings, who did not speak the language, to the tender mercies of Mario. I had taken care to speak very broken Italian myself and to profess an entire ignorance of the numerous dialects. I have always found that in my profession it is more useful to know the patois of a country than its language, for those who wish to converse in a secret tongue before strangers have a strange belief that no one ever learns these dialects. To a certain extent they are right, for I do not suppose any foreigner, however well he spoke English, would understand one word of 'guid braed Gaelic.' So I spent many hours learning Provençal, Milanese, and Neapolitan. Towards the hour of the arrival of Mario's train, Bannister and I sat down in a small wineshop near the station where we could watch the exit. We observed him arrive with the girl Eleonora and a man we had not seen before — a furtive, sly-looking Neapolitan. After a short conversation, Allivi walked in the direction of the lake, whilst the girl and the man jumped into a cab and drove away.

We followed the inventor to the hotel and saw him greet Jennings and then sit down on the veranda from which he could watch the steamer arrive. I managed to mingle with the crowd on the landing-stage and so was able to walk with Monsieur Saillard to the hotel. Here Allivi, after greeting us, introduced the American.

'Tell your employer,' he said to me, 'that Mr. Jennings is also going to be present at the experiments, for if Monsieur Saillard does not buy my patent, then the American will. By the way, do you speak English?'

'No,' I said. 'I can read it a little, but that is all. It is a difficult language for a Frenchman.' Then I turned and translated what Allivi had said.

'When does the demonstration take place?' Monsieur Saillard asked.

'Not until to-morrow night' was the unexpected reply, 'for the excellent Cavalliere Giuseppe Ricci-Ferroni, an admiral of our navy, is coming to-morrow evening and he is placing at my disposal some regulation floating mines, which my ray will explode. You can understand that without his influence I should never be allowed to use the lake for such a purpose. He believes that I shall sell my secret to Italy' — and Mario laughed suddenly — 'but what will they pay me? Nothing. Yet, should both you gentlemen feel dissatisfied with the results, why, then perhaps the admiral will buy my invention after all.'

'I see,' said Monsieur Saillard, his huge form quivering with rage, 'you are playing us one against

the other — the highest bidder wins. Beware, Monsieur — we have paid you a deposit.'

'Which is in the Banca Italiana and which I will return — here — now — if you are not content.' And Mario's eyes flashed with well-simulated rage whilst his hand half-pulled a cheque-book from his pocket. Oh, it was well done — and Monsieur Sallard withdrew from the skirmish with a shrug of his shoulders.

'Are these bombs or mines coming by train?' I enquired, as though quite ignorant of technical questions.

'Ma chère! That would be too dangerous; they are already here — in a government deposit near Belagio. One of the admiral's men will row out to the middle of the lake with a mine and anchor it there. I shall be up in the hills behind the villa Carlotta at Cadenabbia, and, when the boatman signals with a lantern from the shore, I shall cause the mine to explode. To-morrow, when the Cavalliere Ricci-Ferroni is here, I will show you the generator of my ray and explain it to you.'

After a dreary table-d'hôte dinner Allivi wished us good-night, on the pretext of some work which he had to do. I waited until I saw Bannister stroll unconcernedly after him and then slipped down to the lake, where I knew I should find boats in plenty for hire. I rather mistrusted the boatmen, and I had a healthy respect for the razor-sharp wits of Allivi, so I asked to be rowed for an hour over the lake, expressing my desire to enjoy the soft summer night. Then, when we passed one of the larger villages, I

feigned to be seized with a wish to visit it and told the boatman to land me and leave me there, informing him that I should probably come back later by another boat. As soon as he had rowed away, I arranged with the owner of one of the motor boats plying for hire to take me to Bellagio, which is near the opposite end of the lake. I had chosen a fast little craft and was soon there. Telling my man to wait, I sat down on a seat at the water-front where I could not be seen. An hour later I saw a beautiful speedy launch glide up to the mooring pillars: in it was Mario, alone. It was no easy matter to follow him unobserved, but I had taken the precaution of putting on rubber-soled shoes and my clothes were dark. Besides, I knew Bellagio well, and there is only one main street leading out of the little town. Half an hour's walk brought us to a lonely spot surrounded by spreading trees, where I saw an octagonal building of stone with a stout door, but no windows. As Allivi approached, he began to whistle a popular tune, which was evidently a signal, for at the sound a dark shape came from the shadows. I could not see the face, but it was a woman, and I felt sure that it was the charming Eleonora. I watched Mario greet her warmly, and then, after manipulating something that made a grating sound, he pushed back the wooden door of the building, and they both disappeared inside. I did not dare to approach near enough to see what was going on in what I guessed was the storehouse for the mines, for I thought it quite possible that the man I had seen at the station might be watching, so I returned to my waiting





THE SICILIAN



THE ADMIRAL'S DAUGHTER



boatman and arrived an hour later at the hotel. Here I found my friend Bannister, very annoyed at not having been able to follow Allivi. From him I learned that the motor launch in which he had come to Bellagio was kept in a boathouse some distance from the town. I related what I had accomplished, which was to find out where the mines were deposited. We felt pretty certain that in some way Mario tampered with them, although how he did it was as yet his secret.

The next morning a gorgeous person arrived at the hotel, for whom the whole staff, from the manager downwards, turned out en masse. It was the Admiral Ricci-Ferroni: a swarthy, stout, and pompous little man, who strutted about with the grace of a turkey-cock. But there was no mistaking the awe and respect with which he was regarded. I could see that even matter-of-fact Jennings was impressed. With Signor Ferroni was a young girl of such surpassing beauty that it was with incredulity I learned that she was the Admiral's daughter, Giuseppina Ricci-Ferroni. The greeting between handsome Mario and this dazzling flower of Italy left no doubt in my mind as to why she had accompanied the admiral, and that, if she was not interested in the mystery ray, she was at least interested in its inventor. Remembering the Sicilian, Eleonora, I wondered what she would say when she heard of this new arrival and saw the languorous regards of her lover. We were formally presented to the Admiral and his daughter, although what explanation was given to the haughty official for our

presence I do not know. At any rate, he tolerated us — that is the most I can say.

In the afternoon a bulky machine arrived by car and was taken by the Admiral's order to an empty room of the hotel. Here we all gathered for the explanation of his invention which Allivi had promised us. Bannister was not present — he had until now kept discreetly in the background. When we were all seated, Allivi pulled a canvas cover from a complicated mechanism which appeared to me to be chiefly composed of convex and concave mirrors rotating on their axes. Suspended in the centre was a cupola of crystal. The lecture was a long flow of technical jargon, which I could see impressed Signor Ferroni very much. Monsieur Saillard seemed rather sceptical. I translated the long explanation into French, and thus Ezra Jennings, who also spoke that language, was able to follow. The gist of the demonstration was roughly that a musical note, produced on the crystal bell by friction, was carried by a beam of ultra-violet rays to a distance of several miles and its vibration was so calculated that it caused any unstable substance such as melinite to explode. The particular vibration, with the method of transmitting it on an invisible ray, was the secret of the inventor.

I was watching the girl Giuseppina closely during the harangue, and I soon realised that she already was or would soon become another victim of handsome Mario. Some exciting days were in store for us, that was certain, and no musical mystery ray was needed for the spontaneous explosion I felt sure would shortly take place if the two girls met.

The apparatus was taken by boat to Cadenabbia and carried to an eminence some distance inland. A motor lorry also arrived with a large battery of accumulators and several high-tension transformers.

We all waited impatiently for the night. Orders had been given by the police that no boat should remain in the neighbourhood of Bellagio between midnight and one o'clock.

Soon after dinner Mario departed to prepare for the experiment and we followed in a roomy launch. I had arranged for Bannister to come also — but we purposely spoke French. It was a long walk up the hillside, from where we could see the dark surface of Lake Como stretched out below us like a sombre valley. It was a beautiful warm night; the sky, glittering with a host of stars such as one never sees in Northern countries, was now and again illuminated by the flashing searchlights of the Swiss revenue stations. We spoke little: around us myriads of tree-frogs and crickets croaked and chirped in all the notes of the musical scale, and tiny bats fluttered and circled about our heads. Allivi and the charming Giuseppina sat near the dark, inchoate shape of the ray generator. Abruptly Monsieur Saillard rose and focussed his night glass on the distant shore.

'There is a boat with a lantern,' he said.

At the same moment a church clock chimed twelve.

Allivi rose and threw away the cigarette he had been smoking. We saw a small electric bulb abruptly illuminate his apparatus with a red glow and



by its light he manipulated wires and switches. Then he extinguished the lamp and said:

'Va bene — tell me when the boatman waves his lantern from the shore.'

We waited in tense silence until Monsieur Saillard, who was watching through his glass, said:

'Now — I see the signal.' Instantly we heard a low hum and a sweet musical vibration emanate from the shadowy machine. Several seconds passed, and then a huge blood-red flame rose, spreading like a fan from the surface of the water, and a moment later we heard the dull boom and reverberation of the explosion.

The Admiral jumped up excitedly.

'È fatto! È fatto! The mine has exploded! Signor Allivi, you are a genius.'

Jennings and Saillard also murmured their approval, but less warmly.

'I must insist on more than one demonstration,' the American said.

'That is my view also,' added Monsieur Saillard, 'but, above all, I wish to examine the mines before they are placed in the boat. I have also brought a small cylinder containing a new explosive. It will float, and I wish to have it exposed to your ray.'

'Benissimo,' replied Allivi — 'to-morrow night, if Cavalliere Ricci-Ferroni will permit it we will have several mines placed at various distances and also the cylinder of monsieur here, and I will explode them all.'

This assurance startled both Jennings and the Frenchman, and I sensed the unwonted respect

in their voices when next they spoke to the inventor.

We all returned to the hotel, but Bannister and I left at once and settled down to watch from the windows of the place where we were staying and which was almost opposite. Barely half an hour had passed when we saw Mario leave the hotel by a side door, but, instead of going to the boathouse as we had expected, he stopped in the shadow of the trees and whistled; in answer a window of the suite on the first floor, where the Admiral was staying, opened noiselessly and the girl Giuseppina came out on the balcony. As soon as he perceived her, Mario walked quickly across the road and we heard the murmur of conversation carried on in low tones.

‘A lover’s meeting,’ Bannister said in a disgusted voice — ‘Romeo and Juliet. Come along, it’s none of our business and I wish the youngster luck. If I saw much of that girl, I’d fall head over heels in love with her myself.’

We neither of us cared to watch the ‘balcony scene,’ but we did not know whether afterwards Allivi might not go to his boathouse, so we left the hotel quietly and settled down where we could observe the road leading to the water. It was well that we did so, for not long after we heard the Italian approaching gaily humming a song. When he arrived at the shore, we were close behind and we saw that a man was standing there waiting for him. A low-voiced conversation in Neapolitan took place, but it conveyed very little to me. Allivi was merely telling the man that several further experiments

were to take place — only the last phrase was significant.

‘See that all is prepared — and tell the girl to wait for my telephone message,’ he said; then, with a curt good-night, Mario returned to the hotel.

We did the same, for we guessed that for that night we could seek our beds. We arranged, however, to go to Bellagio immediately after breakfast.

Bannister was easily able to pick the lock of the door of the building where the mines were kept. To prevent a surprise, he then walked some distance down the path and hid in the bushes whilst I explored the place. We had agreed upon a signal which would warn me in time if anyone approached. Inside the octagonal room, which was lighted from a skylight in the roof, were six round squat mines of the regulation type, but without detonators. They were of cast steel and I could not see how they could possibly be tampered with. The skylight gave me an idea. Returning with Bannister to Como, we sought Monsieur Saillard, to whom we explained our plan. If Allivi asked him for the special bomb which he had brought, he was to consent to carry it to the house where the mines were stored and leave it there. If, on the other hand, Allivi did not ask for it, then we should have to admit that our suspicions of some occult trickery were unfounded. We had seen no further sign of the strange man nor of the Sicilian, but we guessed that they were staying somewhere in Bellagio.

After lunch, which we ate at the same table with

the inventor and the others, Monsieur Saillard passed me a slip of paper with his cigarette-case, and I read, 'Am going with Allivi to Bellagio after I have written some letters.' I knew that the letters were a means to give me time to reach there before Allivi. We were lucky enough to board one of the little lake steamers unnoticed. I had obtained a large hook from an ironmonger, and this I had tied to a long rope. After several attempts it caught on the stone ledge of the roof, and a few moments later Bannister and I were stretched flat beside the skylight. Soon Saillard and the Italian came up the path accompanied by a man in uniform who unlocked the door. The cylinder, which the Frenchman carried in a large leather bag, was placed on the floor and the door relocked by the official. It was just at dusk that we heard stealthy footsteps, then a grating sound told us that the door was being opened, and a few minutes later we perceived the man with whom Mario had come to Como and the girl Eleonora enter the building, shutting the door behind them. A lamp carried by the girl illuminated the interior sufficiently for us to see what went on. The man unwrapped a powerful ratchet drill, and for a long time he worked with this on the Frenchman's steel cylinder. It appeared to give him much trouble, for several times he paused and changed the drills. At last he rose and extracted something from a glass tube which he then inserted in the hole he had made. I saw that, whatever the substance, it was very minute, and he afterwards used a fine wire to push it in.

'Pretty risky,' Bannister muttered. 'Suppose the stuff inside were to explode?'

'We should certainly go skywards,' I said. 'But what the devil are they putting into the bomb?'

When his work was finished, the man examined all the mines in turn and then, apparently satisfied, he and the girl left, locking the door. We gave them half an hour and, loosely doubling our rope around the iron hook so that we could pull it after us, we climbed down.

Had we not known that a hole had been drilled in the cylinder we should never have found it, for it was not bigger than a pin-point, and it had been closed again with a substance the exact colour of the metal. That night the comedy of the preceding evening was repeated. Monsieur Saillard, to whom we had made no report, examined his cylinder before it was handed to the boatman and declared himself satisfied. He was convinced that it had not been touched. Shortly after midnight, Allivi manipulated his switches and, with the first clear musical throb of the crystal bell, the three mines exploded at regular intervals, and finally a long yellow flame and a sharp crash told us that the one brought by the Frenchman, containing a new chemical, had also exploded.

During the morning I communicated with the Questura at Milan, and Signor Lanfranchi promised to send a detective and two carabinieri at once with a search warrant and an order for the arrest of Allivi. Bannister came with me to the station to meet him. We left Jennings in conversation with



the inventor, and he had been well schooled by us. He was to appear tremendously excited by the result of the experiments and so eager to acquire the invention that he did not hesitate to offer a huge sum — much more than had been agreed upon before — in order to rouse the greed of Mario. He was to tell the Italian that this money could be paid at once, but upon one condition — that a mine was to be also exploded on land and that this should be done that same evening. Jennings had been instructed to leave as soon as the Italian had agreed to this condition, telling him that he would go to the bank in Milan to cash a cheque and bring back the amount agreed upon in ready money; thus leaving the field clear for Monsieur Saillard and the Admiral, for we felt certain Allivi would try to sell his 'invention' to all three. The sight of the detective sent by the Questura gave us a shock. He was a huge man, with a fierce bristling moustache, and to our rage he walked out of the station flanked by two comic-opera gendarmes — a walking advertisement of his profession.

'If Mario has any spy watching for him, that fool will spoil everything,' Bannister growled. Luckily the man left the two gendarmes on guard at the railway station and walked alone to a little hotel, where we had arranged to meet him. We quickly explained what we wanted. He was to go by boat with Bannister to Bellagio and arrest the two confederates when they were busy in the Government building; for we knew that some alteration of their method would be necessary for the experiment on

land. Evidently in some way it had been the water penetrating through a minute hole which had caused the explosions until now.

When I returned to the hotel, Jennings signalled to me that Allivi had accepted the final test, and that he had invited the American to accompany him to Bellagio to fetch the mine.

Shortly after their departure, a telephone call from Bannister informed me that the girl and the man had been caught just as they were marking one of the three remaining mines with a small cross, but before they had been able to tamper with it. They were now locked in the local police station and all signs of the sharp struggle which had taken place in the little tower had been effaced. To make doubly sure, my friend told me, he had wiped the mark off the iron sphere and made a similar cross on another one. As we fully expected, no explosion followed the chime of the bell, although Allivi manipulated his machine for a long time. Then a wire fused and the inventor informed the American that something had gone wrong with his mirrors.

Jennings and Allivi returned to the hotel late at night — arguing angrily. The inventor insisted that the reason for the failure of the demonstration was because his batteries had somehow given out. In the morning he would obtain others and prove that his ray was as efficient on land as on water. In the meantime he would return to Cadenabbia and carefully examine his apparatus in order to make quite sure that nothing else had gone wrong with it.

During the absence of Jennings and Allivi, we

had invited the Admiral and the Frenchman to my room, and here I related all that we had discovered. The Admiral was incredulous. Then, when we pressed him, he admitted that he also had paid a large sum to Allivi as a deposit, and that he had been given to understand that we were merely scientifically interested in the invention. As soon as Jennings joined us, Monsieur Saillard and the American both showed him their contracts and receipts.

Finally I invited them all to come with me to Bellagio. We placed one of the mines in a boat and instructed the boatman to drop it overboard as usual. Ten minutes later it exploded. The Admiral danced with rage. He fiercely ordered the Italian detective to arrest Allivi immediately.

We then went to the police station and arranged for the prisoners to be conducted to Como. When we arrived, we heard that the detective and his two gendarmes were searching the woods where the 'ray generator' was still standing. Towards morning we received the startling information that the motor launch belonging to Allivi was gone. Telephone messages were hastily sent to every town along the lake. It was probable that the Italian heard the explosion of our mine, and guessing that his schemes had miscarried, he had simply escaped by water to Switzerland.

We were about to sit down to an early breakfast when the Admiral burst excitedly into the dining-room. His face was purple and his eyes starting from his head.

'My daughter!' he gasped, waving a letter. 'She

it was who warned this truffatore — this thief. I told her what had happened before we went to Bellagio. And now — now she has fled with him — my Giuseppina!’ And the old fellow sank into a chair sobbing convulsively. I took the letter from his shaking hand.

‘Dear Father,’ she had written, ‘I love Mario — and I have gone with him. Do not pursue him with your vengeance or you will make me very unhappy. I shall kill myself if he is arrested. We are going to start life anew and he is going to marry me ——’

I read no further — it was quite enough. At that crucial moment, the Italian detective stalked into the room — dirty, dishevelled, his fierce moustache drooping sadly, and his untidy hair covered with burrs and bits of grass — and behind him appeared the two gendarmes, both carrying handcuffs. They had spent the night crawling about the forest. It was too much — Bannister and I roared with laughter at the sight; although we immediately apologised to the stricken father. What he said later to the disgusted officer I don’t know, but his influence evidently stopped all further proceedings, for we saw the three officials leave shortly before luncheon. Jennings, to my surprise, developed an unexpected sense of humour, for during the morning he constantly burst into short, cackling laughter.

Later in the day the Sicilian girl was brought to the hotel and we questioned her as to the means employed to cause the bombs to explode. She was sullen and refused to speak. Whilst we were plying her with questions, a telegram arrived for Signor

Ricci-Ferroni. Hastily opening it, he cried: 'It is from my daughter. She and Allivi are on their way to America — they are going to get married on the ship to-day.'

Like a fury the girl Eleonora snatched the telegram from his hand and read it. Then the storm burst — and it was terrible. But we learned what we wished to know. A small hole had been drilled into each of the mines and sodium inserted. The hole had then been closed again with a substance which slowly melted when the mine was dropped in the lake; as soon as the water reached and ignited the sodium, the bomb, of course, exploded. The apparatus with its mirrors and crystal bell was just a beautiful joke; yet it had served its purpose, for, thanks to the clever combination of scientific theories and sodium, Allivi had swindled three people out of a round ten thousand pounds.

The same evening a second telegram arrived for the Admiral informing him that his daughter was now the Signora Allivi.

Jennings smiled grimly.

'There'll be a detective waiting in New York for handsome Mario when he arrives. I've prepared the cable which will put him where he'll swindle no one for some years.'

At the words Signor Ricci-Ferroni jumped up.

'No, no, signor — you must not, I will repay what you have lost — he is now my son-in-law.'

For a long time the American was obdurate, then he said:

'Well, all right — fix it so that both Monsieur



Saillard and I get our money back and we'll let bygones be bygones; but in that case you must let Miss Eleonora go at once, poor girl. I like her and I feel very, very sorry for her. Hi, there, waiter! a bottle of champagne to drink to the bride. He's a lucky devil, that Mario; however I'll keep an eye on him in the States, for he is not going to double-cross his wife — I'll see to that, Admiral. Well, here is to their best health.'

EPISODE VIII  
THE SUICIDE ROOM  
HANOI SHAN



## EPISODE VIII

### THE SUICIDE ROOM

HANOI SHAN

PREMEDITATED murders are committed for one of three reasons — hatred, sex, or greed. Therefore a murderer must be abnormal and lacking in intellect; for no normal intelligent human being would commit murder for one of these motives. Both hatred and sexual passion can be assuaged without bloodshed, and, in the whole history of crime, no murder yet made the perpetrator wealthy. That is why 'murder will out'! Because the mental equipment of the murderer is not able successfully to combat the science and intellect of criminal investigators.

Most murders are merely wantonly brutal or astoundingly stupid. When, however, the exception is born, the gifted, educated, intellectual man, who, because of a kink in his brain, kills for one of these reasons, then the detection of the crime is not always a foregone conclusion — too often the crime is never classified as such. Suicide, or death from misadventure; more often even death from natural causes, with a doctor's certificate given in good faith, has draped the dastardly assassin in a cloak of virtue and placed him out of reach of the sword of justice.

Crimes that are palpably crimes are always discovered and the guilty one punished; but now and again a man will kill with such cunning and subtlety that the victim remains for ever unavenged.

I hesitate, therefore, when about to relate the brief career of that cunning Oriental Hanoi Shan. The world is accustomed to the use of knife, poison, and firearm, the weapons of the fool, because these crimes are always discovered and described. Only once in a hundred years does it happen that such a monster as this Asiatic is evolved, and such misdeeds as his are seldom described — because they are seldom found out. Nor would Hanoi Shan have been unmasked but for the fact that a greater mind than his chanced to be fighting for law and order — that of Dr. Bertillon.

It is many years ago now. But those who wish to verify the story I am about to tell will find a brief outline in the '*Compte rendu des procès en Correctionnelle*,' Paris edition of the '*Chronique des Tribunaux*,' 1907-08.

The weird methods used by Hanoi Shan savour of Edgar Allan Poe, I know; fortunately the records are there.

Many will certainly remember the tremendous sensation caused in the autumn of 1906 by the sudden epidemic of strange, inexplicable deaths which occurred both in London and Paris and which were only little by little proved to have been due to the machinations of a criminal organisation of which the head was an Oriental named Hanoi Shan, soon nicknamed by Parisians '*l'Araignée*,' '*the Spider*.' He had once been governor of a province in Tonkin-China, and was then a tall, fine, athletic man of kindly and upright character.



One day, when he was assisting at the capture of wild elephants, which were being driven into a vast enclosure by specially trained tame animals, one of the wild ones suddenly turned and charged the beast on which Hanoi Shan was sitting. He was thrown from the howdah to the ground. Before any of his men could come to his assistance, the mad elephant picked him up, and, whirling him round and round, in ungovernable rage, smashed him against a tree. From that terrible shock Hanoi Shan had never recovered. Crushed and mangled in dreadful fashion he lingered for months in a French hospital at Saigon. The surgeons did all they could, but little hope of saving his life was entertained. Nevertheless, he did not die. But when at last he left the hospital he had become a twisted, deformed monster, with crooked spine and shortened legs. His once amiable nature had changed as much. An evil smile flickered ever round his thin, flexible lips, and in a very short time his cruelty and ruthless disregard for human life became proverbial.

At last there had come a native uprising. He had been deposed — his lands confiscated and his palace burned. Hanoi Shan escaped to a French gunboat, closely pursued by a furious mob. He had then come to Paris, where he hoped to find a surgeon capable of straightening his injured spine. His quest was doomed to failure. No doctor would risk the operation. With rage and hatred in his heart and insanity slowly eating into his brain, Hanoi Shan had disappeared, only to reappear as the leader of a terrible organisation of criminals. His methods

were unique, for they combined the cunning and ferocity of a madman with the knowledge and wisdom of the East. Hanoi Shan had been noted in Tonkin-China, as a student of occultism, hypnotism, and black magic. He was nicknamed 'l'Araignée' because like a spider he wove cunning webs and with the patience of a spider waited, hidden and unseen, until his victim was caught. Like a spider, too, his long arms and tapering hands were constantly moving, grasping and weaving invisible threads, while his mouth in moments of excitement quivered and twisted like the mandibles of that insect. Strange and horrible were the crimes attributed to his evil plotting. None were so weird, however, as the series of deaths which took place at the Hôtel d'Amsterdam; for here it was not so much the desire for gain as the love of cruelty, which prompted Hanoi Shan to spread his net. Diamonds especially attracted him, and it is thought that this hotel first came under his notice because diamond merchants from Holland often stayed there.

The Hôtel d'Amsterdam in the Rue Lhomond is a little eighteenth-century house, well known to commercial travellers, who prefer the peace and quiet of its comfortable, old-fashioned rooms and its plain, bourgeois fare to the noisy, glittering palace hotels of the Boulevards. It was much frequented by diamond dealers from Antwerp and Amsterdam, probably because the landlord, Mynheer Van der Velde, was himself a Dutchman and a former lapidary. Madame Célestine, a buxom Frenchwoman, was for many years chief cook in the hotel.

When her master died, leaving her a comfortable sum, she had taken over the business and shortly after married Mynheer Van der Velde, who had been a regular guest there and constantly travelled back and forth between Paris and Antwerp with precious stones. After the wedding he had settled down to a lazy life, well content to let his wife manage the business, whilst he smoked long black cigars and drank Schiedam from morning till night.

For several years the business had prospered in spite of the surly ways and black looks of the husband, whose temper married life appeared to have soured, and whose only recreation was a daily walk down the Rue de la Paix, where he feasted his eyes for hours on the glittering displays in the jeweller's windows.

Then abruptly the hotel gained an unpleasant notoriety. An Englishman, just arrived from South Africa, and who carried a large number of diamonds, cut and uncut, in all his pockets as though they were pebbles, had taken room number 14, a large, handsome bedroom on the third floor, with two windows looking out on the street. He arrived on a Wednesday. Since he spoke no French, he spent most of his time lounging in the smoking-room and talking Cape Dutch to the landlord. Several times he had spread out his collection of stones before the fascinated eyes of Mynheer Van der Velde, who for once appeared to have dropped his taciturn habits.

On the Friday evening following his arrival, Culvert, the South African, had retired early. There were at that time no other guests living on the third

floor. When on the Saturday morning the waiter carried the usual coffee and rolls to number fourteen, he found the door locked and received no answer to his repeated knocking. Alarmed and vaguely sensing disaster, madame had then gone upstairs and, since the key was in the lock, she pushed this out with a hairpin and unlocked the door with her master key. At the terrible sight which awaited her she screamed shrilly and then, without entering the room, rushed downstairs to the telephone and summoned the police. Fortunately, the local police station was not far away. The commissaire, Monsieur Maupert, arrived almost at once. Trembling and shaking, madame had conducted him upstairs, unable to say more than 'Il est mort! Il est mort! — He is dead!'

It was true: the Englishman was discovered hanging from a huge ancient iron hook — cemented into the wall — and to which the curtain pole was fixed. The rope by which he was suspended was the cord used to loop back the heavy curtains. The face of the dead man was blue and swollen: his eyes were wide open and fixed in a dreadful, unseeing stare, on the wall opposite to him, against which stood the bed. The expression of the face was that of a man who had died from the shock of some nameless horror. Even the hardened commissaire turned his head away with a shudder. Yet the man's death was obviously due to suicide. More — his desire to die must have been imperative, for his legs were doubled up under him, to prevent them from touching the ground. The hook was low and the cord long



enough to have enabled the man to avoid strangulation by simply standing upright.

'Nom d'un chien,' said the policeman who accompanied the commissaire. 'He had will-power, that one. I should have put my feet down when I felt myself choking.'

No diamonds of any description were found, either in Culvert's pockets or in his trunk. The doctor who was called agreed with the commissaire that no other explanation but suicide was possible.

Two weeks had passed and the tragedy was almost forgotten when a friend of Madame Célestine, a Frenchman this time, was discovered under exactly similar conditions. Number 14 had been occupied two days by a traveller who dealt in precious stones. Nothing had been said to him about the tragedy, but on Friday morning he had learned of it from a fellow countryman, just arrived, who was staying at the hotel when it occurred. He had immediately insisted on moving into another room. Since the hotel was full, madame had given him the room of her friend Monsieur Valdagne, which was on the second floor; and the latter, in order to oblige madame, had taken number 14. On the Saturday morning he was found hanging from the same hook, a piece of the cord from the curtains around his neck, his legs doubled under him, and almost touching the floor. The same awful expression was on his face as that which had distorted the features of Culvert.

'A strange proof of the power of suggestion,' the doctor said when he examined him. 'It is like the



desire one feels to jump from a high window or to throw one's self under a heavy vehicle. He knew of the death of that other one — *et voilà* — he had to try it.'

Suicide was the opinion of the commissaire also; but he nevertheless examined the room very carefully and even tapped on the walls. That day nearly all the guests left the hotel; Madame Célestine was in despair.

'I am ruined!' she cried, wringing her hands — 'ruined! No more travellers will come here now. Oh, I will give a hundred francs if anyone will spend the night in that room — someone who is not mad — who will not want to kill himself.'

During the week the sergeant of police, who had again accompanied the inspector, came to see her. After shuffling his feet and looking foolish for a moment, he said:

'I am a poor man, madame, but I am an old soldier also — I served for ten years in the Zouaves in Africa — I am not afraid of ghosts or devils. I will stay the night in your room number 14 for a hundred francs.'

Madame kissed him on both cheeks and called him 'Mon brave' and 'Mon sauveur,' and the matter was arranged. Mynheer merely shook his head and drank another glass of gin: since the tragedies he had done nothing else.

Poor Madame Célestine slept very little that night. Five times she went and listened outside the door, but was reassured by a loud and healthy snore.

In the morning the agent drank his coffee with

gusto and thumped the table heartily. 'Bon Dieu!' he exclaimed, 'I wish I could earn a hundred francs as easily every day. A soft bed, a grand breakfast, and money besides.'

The news quickly spread in the neighbourhood that someone had spent the night in number 14 and was still alive. But the superstitious crones shook their heads.

'But yes,' they said, 'to-day is only Thursday — let him spend Friday night there and come out alive and we will see. Friday — the evil day — that is when the ghost in number 14 puts the idea of dying into the head of the fool who would sleep there.'

'I will shut the room and have the door and windows screwed up,' said Madame Célestine. 'Nothing has ever happened in my other rooms, and I have been here twenty years.'

'It is the ghost of that mad Englishman,' replied the gossips — 'his spirit haunts that room now. If you shut it up, it will go to another room. Better sell the hotel and leave.'

A Chinaman named Li Hang Foo, who kept a curio shop next door and sometimes bought and sold diamonds, even made her an offer for the hotel, but Madame Van der Velde was stubborn. Putting on a shawl, she ran to the police station. Cassoute, the courageous policeman who had spent a night in number 14, was on duty.

'Will you spend Friday night in the same room?' she asked him, sobbing. 'I will pay you another hundred francs.'

Cassoute slapped his thigh with glee.

‘But yes, madame, and as many more nights as you wish — at the same price?’

So it was arranged. A copious supper and a bottle of special wine was taken up to the old Zouave, who was in great good humour over what he called his luck — his ‘aubaine.’ Poor fellow, he was found dead under exactly similar conditions the next morning. Dead, hanging from the ancient hook, the silken curtain rope round his neck, and his knees bent, with feet almost touching the floor. The same ghastly expression of terror twisted his mouth into a dreadful grin.

Now the papers raised a hue and cry. A haunted room in the heart of Paris. ‘The suicide room’ it was at once called. Again a careful search was made — but in vain. No violence, no foul play had caused those deaths. It was an evil atmosphere, an obsession that seized on all who slept in that chamber. Several papers offered rewards for anyone giving the solution to the mystery. The case of the ‘Marie Céleste’ and other instances of mysterious occult happenings were cited. For a whole week Paris talked of nothing else but this obscure hotel. Psychic mediums flocked to the scene and tried to commune with the spirit or the evil influence. Then came fresh sensations — a bank manager had absconded, a political crisis filled all the available space in the papers, and the matter was forgotten by the fickle public.

But Ricardo Garibaldi, a young medical student, poor and friendless, remembered that the rewards had not been revoked.

One morning he called to see the once buxom Madame Célestine, now pale and listless and short of temper. In halting words he asked for permission to investigate the mystery. At first she would not listen to him. Then, because he insisted earnestly that he had a theory, she sent him to the commissaire.

‘He has the key of the room now,’ she said. ‘He has forbidden that anyone shall enter. You must obtain his consent.’

This, after much argument and pleading, the young man obtained. The commissaire insisted, however, that certain precautions should be taken. The young fellow was first examined by a doctor, who pronounced him strong and healthy. During the day a telephone was also installed in number 14. This was to call the commissaire instantly, if need arose. Strict orders were given to the exchange that, even if the receiver were merely lifted, connection should be made and the bell in the commissaire’s office was to ring at once. He would be ready at any time to rush to the sinister room. Should he be out, one of his ‘agents’ would come.

The young man smiled at these precautions. ‘There will be no need, monsieur. I have a theory, and no desire whatever to hang myself. With the money the papers offer as reward, I shall marry my Georgette and be happy.’

That was on a Monday. Twice every day and once every evening the worthy commissaire called the student to the telephone.

‘Quite well, thank you,’ was the unvarying reply.

'Madame feeds me on the best food and gives me the oldest wine she has. I am getting fat.'

It was true; as the days passed and nothing happened, the landlady began to take heart. Every few hours some little dainty was sent up to Ricardo. The young man had brought his books with him and spent his time studying. Once a day, while the room was being cleaned, he went for a walk, calling on the commissaire on his way back. The mystery was being solved, he told him, but would not say more.

Then came the dreaded Friday. During the evening the commissaire telephoned twice and received a reassuring reply.

On Saturday morning Ricardo Garibaldi was found hanging from the curtain hook — dead! His legs were bent at right angles under him and his dilated eyes were fixed in a horror-struck stare on the wall. The wire of the telephone had been cut. A table knife, brought up with the supper, was lying on the floor; on its edge were some of the silken insulating threads.

This time the commissaire placed a policeman at the door of number 14 and telephoned to Monsieur Dufresne.

'This is no suicide,' he insisted, 'but some unspeakably monstrous crime.'

Dr. Bertillon himself came with me to the Rue Lhomond.

Photographs were taken in detail and the knife packed for transport. I have never seen Dr. Bertillon so moved.



‘Poor, poor lad,’ he murmured tenderly, lifting the body of the young man so that I could unfasten the cord, which had cut deeply into his neck.

‘But they have done this once too often. Now we have them; look!’ and he pointed to the purple mark of the rope. I looked, but failed to see what he meant.

‘Measure the thickness of the cord,’ he whispered.

I did so with special callipers.

‘Now measure the weal on his neck.’

I did this, too, and shivered. The rope which had strangled the unfortunate youth had been several millimetres thinner than the cord from which he had been suspended after death had ensued.

‘You see,’ said my chief, still in a whisper. ‘They came in — he was then already helpless; strangled him and held his legs doubled under him. Then, when “rigor mortis” had set in, he was suspended with that cord from the hook. The fiends! It was the strange position of the legs, as if the victims had drawn them up whilst hanging themselves, which deceived everyone and made it appear to be suicide. Yet always they forgot something. This time it was the thickness of the cord.’

‘And the knife?’ I asked.

‘Oh, we shall find nothing there, I’m afraid. They would use a handkerchief to hold it with. However, we’ll see.’

Suddenly he looked searchingly at the carpet.

‘Give me a knife, quick,’ he whispered excitedly.

I did so.

Cautiously he lifted up the edge. Under it was

a small white object. It was a ball of tightly rolled paper. Opening it, we saw that it was covered with a faint tracing in pencil. Aided by the lens we made out several words.

'Something — happening — the wall is ——' Then came a word that looked like 'shining,' then the single word — 'assassins'!

With a gesture Dr. Bertillon indicated the wall near the bed, then in a loud voice he said:

'Well, it's obviously another case of insanity. Come along, we are wasting our time.'

Gathering my implements I followed him out of the room. In the corridor the unhappy landlady was waiting, wringing her hands.

'Eh bien, monsieur,' she wailed, 'have you discovered the cause of all these deaths?'

Dr. Bertillon shook his head.

'There is no cause,' he replied loudly, 'it is just coincidence. My men will come in a day or two and fumigate the room in case there is some poison in the air, otherwise we can do nothing. The policeman will stay until the body of that poor young student is taken away. Then you may let it again. If the people who sleep there know nothing of these suicides, nothing will happen.'

Turning a deaf ear to her laments, he walked downstairs. In the hall he met the husband, apparently maudlin with drink. I saw Dr. Bertillon stop and look searchingly at him, then after a sharp order to the waiting policeman he passed out.

In the car he lay back silently. I could see that his brain was actively engaged with the case.

Once in his office his demeanour changed. Order after order was given to obedient officials: for an hour I was left alone whilst he interviewed the chiefs of several departments; then he returned with a satisfied smile.

'Now, mon ami,' he said sitting down at his vast table strewn with a litter of documents, photographs, and pages covered with weird hieroglyphics, 'I can see that you are on "hot coals," as we say. But I am going to tell you very little. Instead, I am going to ask you to send for your big American friend Bannister. When he arrives, come back to me and we will also plot a little. No, don't look so happy — I am not sure whether I shall risk sending either of you to that infernal place. Indeed, it is only because you will be able to play successfully the parts of foreigners that I feel inclined to think about it.'

A rare smile transformed his grave face. I thanked him hurriedly and rushed out. I could hardly contain myself. Without waiting to make sure that Bannister would be in, I drove to the Rue Scribe. Fortunately for my peace of mind the American was there.

He looked at me in surprise as I burst excitedly into his study.

'What's happened, friend?' he drawled. 'Are the apaches after you?'

'It's the Hôtel d'Amsterdam!' I cried, 'and Bertillon asked me to send for you.'

'Well, that's fine, but why? Are we to commit suicide?'

Briefly I related all I knew. When I had concluded, Bannister rose and put on his hat.

'Come on,' was all he said. 'Your chief is a genius. Let's go to him at once.'

We met Lebrun, the analyst, coming out as we hurried along the corridor leading to the rooms of Dr. Bertillon.

'Bonne chance,' he called after us genially, 'but beware of going to sleep!'

I stopped with my hand on the door ——

'Why?' I asked.

Lebrun pointed to the room — 'The doctor will tell you.'

After shaking hands with Bannister, Dr. Bertillon pointed to chairs and began, turning to my friend:

'You are not officially one of us, monsieur — officially, I say; for unofficially there is no one we esteem more. So I have taken the liberty of calling you in to help us in avenging all those poor people who were tortured and killed in monstrous fashion. I know you are afraid of nothing; that is a national trait, I believe; and, secondly, you can play the part which I have in my mind sufficiently well to deceive even Orientals. No — I am not teasing you, monsieur' — for Bannister, whose fondness for make-up was well known to the Sûreté, had flushed and shifted uneasily in his chair. 'We do not as a rule use disguises, but in this case it will be useful — and even necessary. But I will tell you briefly what you must guard against. Above all, go armed and do not hesitate to shoot. The evil creature we hope to capture will have no compunction. These are

strange words from a member of the Sûreté, which fights for law and order. But the case is exceptional and I would never forgive myself if anything happened to either of you. Here are two sets of respirators Lebrun has made for you. You must use them as soon as you notice the least odour. The murderers are in league with the Chinaman, Li Hang Foo, who owns the house next to the hotel. But they have probably several secret exits, and we lack evidence enough for a conviction; that is why I am risking your lives.

‘So far as I have been able to ascertain, these same evil creatures were responsible for the recent mysterious death of Charles Langham, the Hatton Garden diamond merchant, who is supposed to have committed suicide; his body was found in the river. And there are many others in London and in Paris which I will not cite now. We have identified the Chinaman. He originally came from San Francisco and was notorious there as one of the worst hatchet men of Chinatown. He, however, is only a humble member of the gang. The leader and brains of this criminal organisation is one Hanoi Shan, who comes from French Indo-China. He is, I imagine, a madman. I have his history also, but I will not stop to read it now. Their method at the hotel, so far as I can reconstruct it from the facts in my possession, is the following:

‘At a given moment some sort of vapour, produced by an Eastern drug, enters the room through a hidden pipe. Lebrun has given me the names of several which would produce the species of catalepsy



which obviously rendered the victims helpless. I imagine that the body became rigid whilst the nerves and brain remained active. The electric light would then be extinguished. The wires leading to that room have been tapped, and the current can be switched off from the other side of the wall. One of my men has been busy in the room, apparently repairing the telephone wire which was cut, but really in order to make sure of this. Then a part of the wall would slide or move back. The mechanism of this is so cunningly contrived that it is hardly possible to see any joint. I imagine that the assassins thereupon entered and that this Hanoi Shan assisted at some awful torture of which his crazy brain invented variations in every case. It is horrible even to speak of what must have taken place. That poor lad to-day — But I will not go into details — Then they strangled their victim, whilst he was in a kneeling posture and later, when the body was quite rigid, he was placed in the position in which all four were found. Now — this is what you must do; you, Monsieur Bannister, will leave the Nord Station when the train from Cherbourg arrives on Wednesday afternoon at five thirty-five. Even to that extent must we be thorough. A porter will give you the card of the hotel and you will go there. Your appearance will be that of an American business man, one who might possibly deal in precious stones. I think I can safely leave the choice of your make-up to you.'

Here Bannister grinned suddenly and we both had to laugh.

'You, Monsieur Ashton-Wolfe, since you speak Dutch, will arrive from Holland in the morning and you will drive to the Hôtel d'Amsterdam. I have chosen Wednesday because the first boat from New York arrives then. Besides, nothing will happen until Friday.'

'But why Friday in the name of Heaven?' asked Bannister.

'Ah, that, monsieur, I cannot tell — some freak — some whim of this creature, Hanoi Shan. Possibly some Eastern superstition. I do not know. Neither of you will ask for any special room, but insist on being high up because you do not like the noise from the street. Under no condition must you know each other, but, since you will eat at the hotel, you will appear to become acquainted. During the day spend your time as you will. You, Monsieur Bannister, will be given room number 14. The landlady will be out when you arrive — I will see to that — and the husband will take you there himself.'

'How do you know that, Doctor?' Bannister asked curiously.

'I am sure of it,' Dr. Bertillon replied. 'There will be trouble when madame returns, but that does not matter. On Friday evening you must both dine early and retire — separately. Your friend will then come unseen to number fourteen, the door will be unlocked, and, as soon as he taps on the handle, you, Monsieur Bannister, must switch off the ceiling light for a second and then switch on the table lamp. That second will allow your friend to enter

and hide under the bed. Do not speak to each other — have your respirators ready and wait. Here they are; you see, they are in the form of plugs which will fit into the nostrils. Do not breathe through the mouth, however unpleasant the sensation is which these things produce. I and my men will be ready. As soon as the door in the wall slides back, and the men have entered, capture them, blow your whistles, and rush into the next house. Waste no time and stun or shoot anyone who resists. The house will be surrounded and we shall meet inside. Every one of your colleagues will wear a tri-colour arm-band. Now, good-bye and good luck.'

The intervening days until Wednesday were very dull. Neither of us dared to go near the Rue Lhomond, although we were both eager to try a little prowling about the neighbourhood on our own account.

On the Wednesday morning I dressed as a middle-class traveller, filled a bag with clothes, gummed some Dutch hotel labels on the outside, and, taking a cab, drove to the North Station, telling the cabman to stop at the customs. Here I passed through the private door of the inspector's office and so was able to mingle with the crowd leaving the train I was supposed to have travelled by. Shortly after, I arrived at the hotel. Speaking French with a pronounced Dutch accent, I obtained a room on the third floor — number eleven.

At six o'clock I saw Bannister arrive. He had cleverly dressed himself in such fashion that he looked the typical American business man, just off

the boat after a long sea trip. A bag and steamer trunk, labelled 'Wanted — first class,' completed the illusion. He wore spectacles and a travelling-cap, and his brown shoes were of the broad, square-toed type then fashionable in the States. I had seen madame go out soon after my arrival and the husband, Mynheer Van der Velde, conducted Bannister straight up to number fourteen. The game had started.

I slept badly that night! The next day at lunch Bannister passed me the mustard — I handed him the bread — and we fell naturally into conversation. *I discovered that he was from America and, since I spoke a little English*, was delighted to try it on him. I do not know what passed between husband and wife when she discovered that a guest was staying in number 14, but no change was made. We both watched the Dutchman carefully, for we suspected that he was an accomplice, but he spent most of his time in his own room. At last Friday evening arrived. I asked madame for some aspirin at dinner, complaining that I had a bad headache and told her that I would go to bed at once. Bannister went noisily into the writing-room and, taking a bundle of paper and envelopes, he ordered pen and ink to be sent to his room. I quickly put on rubber-soled shoes, made sure that my pistol was fully loaded, slipped several extra clips into my pockets, together with an electric torch, and crept across to number 14. Tapping on the handle, I heard the click of a switch: in an instant I was in the room, and had crawled beneath the bed as the table lamp

was lighted. A strong hand came feeling under the valance and a quick clasp and grip was all we dared to do. But it was enough — it braced us for the coming ordeal. Peeping out, I perceived my friend sitting at the table facing the wall. I saw that he had inserted the little cones of specially prepared gauze into his nostrils and I did the same. An hour passed in absolute silence. Suddenly a clock chimed eleven and with the sound came another — a sibilant breathing, which proceeded from Bannister. He was leaning back in his chair, rigid, his eyes glued on the wall. Horrified at his appearance, I was about to crawl out, when his hand, which was hanging down by his side, motioned me back. I understood. His keen senses had noticed something, and he was feigning to be overcome in order to deceive unseen watchers. I pulled out my respirators and was at once aware of a subtle odour that caused my head to swim. Quickly I replaced the gauze. At that instant the light went out! I at once slipped forward and crouched beside the bed, watching the wall with straining eyes, pistol and lamp ready. Bannister remained in the chair, but I saw that his hand now held a shining automatic. Several minutes passed, then came a rasping, grating sound and where the wall had been we saw a faintly luminous haze which gradually became brighter. Abruptly a figure was revealed, standing in a recess. I say a figure, but it was a nightmare horror. From the shoulders of the squat, deformed body, clad in Chinese fashion, swung two long thin arms with narrow hands and knotted, crooked fingers, which



shook and quivered like the antennæ of an insect. But the face — the wicked inhuman face! It has often haunted my dreams since: the mouth was twisted into an evil smile and the thin, flexible lips moved ceaselessly from side to side, whilst the eyes, luminous like those of a cat, glared at Bannister with hypnotic fixity. A few seconds this beast remained thus, then he stepped forward into the room, chuckling hideously.

From behind him came several others, all Orientals. They neared my friend with gliding, noiseless steps; it was time to act! With a sudden bound I sprang forward — placing myself between them and the opening in the wall. At the same moment I switched on my lamp and yelled, 'Stand still and up with your hands.' Simultaneously with my sudden action, Bannister knocked over table and chair and seized the first man, the ogre, by his tunic, pushing his pistol into his stomach. Instantly all was confusion. I felt my legs seized from behind and pulled from under me, whilst my weapon was wrenched from my hand. I heard the roaring detonation of the Colt which Bannister used, and the fall of heavy bodies. Outside several whistles shrilled and heavy blows sounded somewhere on a door. Feet trampled over me; I seized one of these, bringing the man to the ground. Then Bannister was helping me up and a pistol was pushed into my hand. The light from the wall had gone out, but luckily Bannister still had his torch. The section of wall was sliding forward, but we pushed the table into the breach and prevented it from shutting.

Three men were on the ground: two of them were unconscious, but the one I had pulled down was unhurt, and we quickly slipped handcuffs on him. Someone was pounding furiously on the bedroom door, which we had locked to prevent escape. Leaving the men outside to break it down, we rushed into the next house, where shrieks and oaths told us that a battle was in progress. The police were driving a number of men towards us. Seeing their retreat cut off, they surrendered. Nine men, amongst whom were four Chinese, were captured in the house we had entered. Three more, of whom two were badly wounded, were in room number 14, but the monster, Hanoi Shan, was not amongst them. A search of the premises disclosed an underground passage leading out into a shop in another street. Monsieur Dufresne and Dr. Bertillon were both waiting in the curio-dealer's shop below. They were delighted to see that we were unhurt. An exploration of the underground passage disclosed pools and splashes of blood.

'That is from the beast with the shining eyes,' said Bannister. 'He must have been carried away. I fired two shots with my pistol against his body when my friend fell down, for I thought they had killed him.'

Many were the proofs of crimes and thefts we found in the house of Li Hang Foo. There we discovered, amongst other things, the wallet which had belonged to Culvert.

To my surprise I saw Mynheer Van der Velde

standing talking to some of the detectives. Monsieur Dufresne saw my astonished look.

'He has been acting for us ever since the death of the student,' he said. 'Mynheer is a customs official, employed by America to prevent the smuggling of stones into the States.'

We hunted many weeks for the Asiatic, Hanoi Shan, but without result. Some months later the Sûreté received a communication from Buenos Aires, informing us that he had been seen there, but had again evaded capture.

The hotel changed its name and is now a 'Pension de famille.' The entrance to the next house has been bricked up and the subterranean passage closed. I believe that it still exists, however.

The men we had captured, although some were most ably defended, were all sentenced to lifelong detention. Although no actual proof of their complicity could be brought forward, the evidence found in the house was so overwhelming that the jury did not even retire to consider their verdict.

Li Hang Foo was claimed by the American police and extradited. He died in the electric chair.



EPISODE IX  
THE SCENTED DEATH  
HANOI SHAN





## EPISODE IX

### THE SCENTED DEATH

#### HANOI SHAN

I WAS busily at work on a new method for detecting forgeries, and the intricate details of this discovery, which was all my own, absorbed my attention to the extent of making me forget both meals and time. I was quite startled, therefore, when Bannister threw open the door and walked excitedly into my room.

Now Bannister is one of those Americans who appear to have inherited the stoical indifference of their red-skinned countrymen, and to see him animated was very unusual. I felt instinctively that the reason for his excitement must be something quite uncommon. For once, too, his appearance was normal; by normal I mean that he had not adopted the dress and manners of a cabman, apache, chauffeur, or any other Parisian character, according to the case he was busy on.

Bannister's love of disguise was quite extraordinary; in fact I have never known any man so fond of being someone else. To-day he was just himself, tall, clean-shaven, and muscular, with the clear, blue eyes of his Northern ancestors: eyes that looked straight at you, and gave you the feeling that here was a real man.

Had it been anyone else, I should have felt angry at the interruption, but Bannister and I were much too near perfect friendship. I could only smile

and hold out my hand. His grip was always something to remember and I instinctively braced myself for it.

Throwing his hat, which resembled a Western sombrero, across the room, he sank down into a chair.

'Can I talk to you?' he asked. 'There's a wonderful crime just been committed, and I'm anxious for you to help me. Could you get away from your microscopes and cameras for a few days?'

'Sure!' I answered, for I knew he loved this Americanism. 'When you come and call a crime *wonderful*, it must be worth investigating, but I am forced to obtain permission from my chief first.'

'All fixed,' Bannister grinned cheerfully. 'I knew you'd say yes, so I saw Dr. Bertillon as I came up, and he is quite willing to let you take a hand. I believe it's our dear friend the Spider again.'

'Good Heavens!' I exclaimed. 'Hanoi Shan? Why, he is either dead or hiding in South America.'

'Oh, no, he is not! Dupuis, the "Mouchard,"<sup>1</sup> swears he saw one of his men, Gustave — you remember Gustave — two days ago, loitering about near the entrance to the Conciergerie, where the prisoners for the assizes arrive for trial. Don't forget that to-morrow is the trial of Larue, one of the last men caught when we rounded up the gang of the Rue Lhomond. You know Shan; he never leaves his men to their fate. It is one of his principles always to help them. Do you know who is defending this common, penniless apache? Labord himself; and

<sup>1</sup> Police spy.

that means a fee of at least two thousand francs; where did Larue get this money from, eh?’

I was dumbfounded. Maître Labord was one of the greatest criminal lawyers of Paris. This certainly looked as if friends of Shan, at any rate, were coming to the rescue of Larue.

If Shan himself was still alive — and what would be infinitely worse, in Paris — we might expect a terrible epidemic of crime once more.

That horrible little Asiatic! ‘Little’ I say, although it was only because his body had been so unbelievably crushed and trampled by the rogue elephant that he was now shrunken and small. Once the Spider must have been a tall, fine man. No doubt too, that the terrible encounter had warped his brain and made him a criminal monomaniac. The eminent surgeons, whom he came to Paris to consult, would have done well to have recognised this latent insanity and so saved the world much suffering. The subtlety and profound knowledge of Shan made him the most dangerous criminal in Europe.

Whilst I thus mentally reviewed our last battle with Hanoi Shan, at the Rue Lhomond, Bannister had approached my table. On it were some of the complicated lines and curves that were an infallible means for detecting forged writings. Putting his hand on my shoulder, he stooped over me to examine them. As he did so, an intense feeling of irritation came over me, almost a desire to strike, or even to wound my friend, while at the same time a subtle and strange odour assailed my nostrils. With a snarl I threw his hand off and sprang up. I felt dizzy and

unhappy. Bannister's cheerful nod only annoyed and intrigued me.

'What is it?' I asked. 'I — I feel ill.'

Something about Bannister puzzled me; he looked like a man trying an experiment.

'It's all right, my dear fellow; smell this; and you'll understand! It has to do with the case in which I want your help.'

So saying, he threw a fine linen handkerchief into my hand. A most horrible perfume came from it.

Sweet it was, and seductive, yet, at the same time — how shall I describe it? Only those who have inhaled the peculiar odour of the white orchid, called by the natives of Borneo the Hai Tang, will know what I mean. As I held the piece of linen near my face, waves of sound filled my ears, the familiar room disappeared, and in its place scenes of violence, like streamers of mist, passed before my eyes. All the deeds of bloodshed in history seemed to surround me and a mad desire to kill invaded my nerves and brain.

With a start I came to myself, to find that Bannister had snatched the handkerchief away and was watching me with a tense expression.

'Well! What do you think of it, eh?' he said. 'Made you feel as if you wanted to murder me, didn't it? — and yet we've been pals for years.'

'Yes,' I answered. 'I felt like running amuk. The thing is vile! It's poisoned. Though what the poison is I don't know; perhaps Lebrun will be able to analyse it.'

With a shudder I picked up the kerchief with a



pair of tweezers and placed it in a glass jar, screwing the lid down tightly.

‘Now tell me about it,’ I said to my friend. ‘This is diabolical. What has happened and where was it found? Certainly no European uses such poison? As you say, it looks very much as if our friend Hanoi Shan is again active.’

‘Yes, not for nothing is he nicknamed “l’Araignée,” the Spider. He plots and weaves; others carry out the deeds of violence his twisted brain conceives. I see that you have enlarged the finger-prints found on the club with which Dr. Léon Combat was killed. Have you found whose they are?’

I shook my head.

‘Unknown, eh?’ Bannister continued. ‘Well, as you may remember, I was present at the investigation. No clue of any kind, but a faint smell, very faint, the same, I believe, which now comes from that piece of linen, was floating about the room in which the body lay. I should never have remembered it if I had not found this thing to-day.’ And he pointed to the jar in which was the handkerchief.

‘Madame Combat has since been sent to the Château d’Orly and declared insane. The shock produced by the discovery of her husband’s body is the probable cause, the doctors say. I rather think that *she* killed him, under the influence of that same poison. Well then there is the murder of Madame Laroche and the theft of her priceless jewels. Again no arrest followed. Dr. Regimbaud was the first to find her, since he was her physician and called upon her daily. He speaks in his report of a most nause-

ating odour pervading the house. Then there is the Steinheil case, husband and mother dead, but no proof against anyone. Now to-day Van Bromen.'

'What!' I shouted. 'Van Bromen dead?'

'Yes,' Bannister replied. 'This morning Van Bromen, the Dutch-American diamond merchant, was discovered dead in his flat, and, according to his clerk, diamonds worth one million francs, a recent consignment from Amsterdam, are probably missing. We have not yet opened the safe. In the flat I found that thing.' Again he pointed to the jar.

'As you know, I have several times had occasion to visit Van Bromen, acting on orders from Pinkerton's in New York. Yesterday I received a cable from our American headquarters, asking me to see Van Bromen at once. So it was that I arrived this morning just as the door had been broken down by his servants.

'The room presented some curious points: although I, too, should feel convinced, as the investigating judge, who has made a first rapid examination, already does, that it is a case of suicide, if it were not for that handkerchief, which was tightly clutched in the dead man's hand. I said nothing about it to anyone. I also persuaded Monsieur Dufresne to allow me to investigate for myself and to coöperate with the Sûreté men. Come along, therefore, and bring your instruments. We must hurry, though, for if the juge d'instruction thinks it is suicide, they may unwittingly destroy valuable traces.'

I jumped up eagerly; this was interesting, indeed.

‘Wait, though,’ I said, reluctantly taking the handkerchief out of the jar again and spreading it out on a sheet of paper. ‘Let us examine this first.’

It was a square piece of linen of fine quality: a man’s handkerchief. In a corner was the monogram ‘H.V.B.’ I pointed this out to Bannister; Van Bro-men’s evidently.

Bannister nodded. ‘I found it in his outstretched hand.’

Near the centre was a circular, dirty mark! Taking up a powerful magnifying-glass, I looked carefully at this, covering my mouth and nose with a piece of cotton wool.

‘I think a glass or a tumbler has been cleaned with it,’ I said, ‘and it is from this round stain that the uncanny smell appears to come. Perhaps Van Bro-men drank some sort of poison and tried too late to wipe the glass.’

I measured this mark very carefully.

A further examination showed that the piece of linen had been crumpled and held in the hand for some time, for marks of perspiration were plainly visible under the lens. Replacing the handkerchief carefully in the jar, I rose to follow Bannister, but before leaving I telephoned for Lebrun, the clever chemist attached to the Paris Sûreté, and asked him to come to my laboratory at once.

I had hardly finished dressing for the street when he entered. Bannister always made fun of the little Frenchman, whose stooping shoulders and peering, red-rimmed eyes made him look like some uncouth owl, but I knew what a wonderful fund of experience

and knowledge that ungainly exterior covered. As soon as Bannister saw Lebrun, he stepped towards him with outstretched hand.

The Frenchman looked up at him, a good-humoured smile on his pale lips. 'No! no! Monsieur the American,' he said, putting his hands behind his back. 'I love your big broad shoulders and your giant muscles, and, were I your size, I should love to grip your hand, too; but once was enough! I could not handle my microscopes for three days afterwards. We will assume that we *have* shaken hands, eh, Meester Bannister?' Then turning to me, he said, 'Ah, again a collaboration of France, England, and America; then it will be interesting for me.'

I explained the effect of the poisoned linen to him and saw him carry it away with relief. The thing was a horror, but, if the poison was known, then Lebrun would classify it.

Outside, a car was waiting, and we were soon on our way to 9 Boulevard Malesherbes, where Van Bromen had lived. Although the body was only discovered that morning the second edition of the 'Intransigent' had already published a long, flamboyant article about it, adding many imaginary details. Naturally a crowd surrounded the house, which was near the Madeleine Church.

Van Bromen's flat was on the third floor. In the antechamber and dining-room, nothing out of the ordinary was to be noticed, but, when we entered the dead man's study and library, the drawn curtains and stale odour gave an instant impression of

tragedy. Many objects had been thrown about, smashed, broken, and destroyed. Some valuable paintings of the early Dutch school had even been ruthlessly ripped from their frames.

One would imagine that in this room of grim happenings a frantic search for something minute had taken place. The curtain had been drawn from before the door of a safe in the wall and, lying in front of this, face downwards, was the unfortunate Van Bromen. I immediately set to work. Several photographs were taken of the body from a double-ladder arrangement brought for me by the police, which made it possible to take a picture of the victim from above.

This has been found to be one of the most important operations of the science of investigation. The bird's-eye view thus obtained fixes definitely the position of the various details and their relationship to each other, and, as in this case, to a body. Thus a prolonged and careful examination is possible, whereby trifles sometimes of the greatest importance are seen, which would, from the ground, escape notice.

The room, too, was photographed from various angles, a measured screen being placed inside the camera, which, when the plates are developed, gives an exact scale of the size of the scene.

All portable objects likely to have been touched were carefully placed in special cases, so that nothing came in contact with their surface. They were then removed to the Sûreté laboratory. The medical officer now came, and together we very carefully



turned the body over. For the moment he merely scrutinised the lips and eyes, also the finger-nails. On the table was a small box with a medical syringe, and a bottle containing a colourless fluid. Neither had been touched until then. Lifting up the bottle by the rim with a special instrument, the doctor poured a drop of the liquid into his hand. A rapid test proved it to be a strong solution of morphine. An overdose of this, injected under the skin of the left forearm, where a red puncture was visible, had evidently caused Van Broman's death.

'Suicide,' the medical expert said, shrugging his shoulders. 'Very banal, this case, quite uninteresting.'

This was also the opinion of Monsieur Colbert, the Sûreté officer in charge of the investigation.

Luckily he was a good friend of mine, so that he did not object to my further examination, but he laughed at the trouble I was taking.

'Eh bien, you are wasting your time, mes amis, you hear what the doctor says. Besides, the door was locked and bolted on the inside, and no one but poor Van Broman in the room when it was forced. However Monsieur Bannister has often helped us, and, if he wishes you to do this, why, all right.'

Thus encouraged I continued my work. Bannister and I knew of the handkerchief, whilst he did not.

I felt certain that could we but discover a proof that someone else had been in the room before the door was opened, we should be able to convince the Sûreté that it was a crime and not suicide. All my efforts were directed to this end.

Formerly, in order to bring out the traces which a hand always leaves on a polished surface, powdered antimony, or even ordinary lampblack, was used. Sometimes, when I was not sure whether an object had been touched, I simply allowed the smoke of a burning match to blacken it; whereupon the fine tracery of the lines on fingers and thumb become sufficiently visible to show whether they are worth analysing. Lately, however, in the laboratory of Dr. Bertillon a new vegetable colour had been discovered which made it possible to photograph not only fresh imprints, but even those weeks old. Thanks to this new dye, Dr. Bertillon had succeeded, as an experiment, in clearly reproducing a finger-print made on the surface of a mirror ten years previously.

This science of dactyloscopy, to which the name of my illustrious teacher, Dr. Bertillon, has become intimately attached, is not a new one, as some people and even some juries think. Dating from the earliest times in history, we find that man has been aware of the fact that the ridges and lines of the human hand, and especially the phalanges of the fingers, differ in every human being, but remain typical in every one, from the cradle to the grave.

The ancient cave-dwellers were wont to powder a red ochre over their right hand, then firmly placing the hand on a smooth part of the wall near the entrance, they thus left a mark that could not be imitated, in sign of ownership. The print of the thumb in the soft clay of ancient Chinese porcelain was also the first indelible signature of the artists.

In China, as far back as the seventh century, the laws of Yung Hwai imposed the imprint of the thumbs of the man and woman, on the document that made them man and wife.

In 1868, Sir William Herschell, Governor of Bengal, made a regulation whereby all his employees were required to place their finger-prints alongside their written signature.

If one looks at the fingers under a magnifying-glass a series of lines, semi-circular or semi-triangular, at once become apparent, covering the whole surface of the sensitive end of the first phalanges. The strange thing is that these lines never vary. As they were at birth so they will remain until old age.

But no two people have the same lines. It is upon this curious fact that Dr. Bertillon, once merely a humble clerk of the French Government, built up his wonderful system, called 'anthropometrical' — that is, the measuring of the human form.

The various police laboratories of the world now all possess thousands of finger-prints and photographs classified according to type, which have been taken from men and women arrested at some time in their lives for offences against the law.

That is why, when a crime is committed and marks or stains are found on or near the spot, on glasses, on the polished surface of a table, on the handle of a weapon, or on a sheet of paper, they are at once photographed. Nearly always, within a short time, a card is found in the records on which are imprints collected by the police, which correspond with

those photographed at the spot where the crime was discovered.

On this card, or 'fiche,' as it is technically termed, are also the photograph and the name of the man or woman, together with a list of former misdeeds. Thus the police know at once with whom they have to deal and for whom they have to search.

That is why in this room of gruesome tragedy, I proceeded to photograph all smooth surfaces where a hand might have rested. These various operations lasted over two hours.

Bannister and I then continued the examination of the room itself. It was a large, oblong chamber with a very high ceiling. There was only one window, which was of the usual French style — that is, opening like a double door inwards, and locking by the turning of a central handle which operated a sliding bar at the top and bottom. This was closed, and, besides being on the third storey, looked out on the street. No one could have entered or escaped that way: neither upwards to the roof nor downwards to the street, since the handle could not be turned from the outside.

The safe now claimed our attention. It was shut, but two clear finger-marks appeared on the massive knob when I sprayed it with our coloured powder.

Monsieur Colbert had sent to the makers for a man to open it, as no memorandum of the combination had been discovered; although a search had been made for it in the pocket-book and among the pa-

pers of the diamond dealer. Would it be empty or should we find the diamonds still there?

The servants were now called one by one, and questioned.

Van Bromen had been alone in his study all the preceding afternoon. Only an employee of the telephone service had called towards five o'clock because the bell of the instrument in the study was giving trouble. The valet had let him in, but did not know when he went, as he had been ordered by his master to go to Versailles with an important letter.

The valet, whose name was Gustave Valois, had waited for the person to whom the letter was to be given. He had dined, after delivering it, and, since the hour was late, had played cards with some friends before returning.

The butler Charles, who, besides the cook and the valet Gustave, was the only servant Van Bromen kept, stated that he had conducted the man Gustave had passed on to him, to his master's study, and had seen him start to work on the telephone.

Monsieur Van Bromen appeared quite normal; he was busy writing, and on these occasions never liked to be disturbed. It was then about five-thirty in the afternoon. Charles had already requested permission that morning to be allowed to go to a servants' dinner and ball, at the club to which he belonged, and for which an invitation had arrived the day before. He left shortly afterwards. Before leaving, he had looked in to see if anything further was wanted, and was then informed that Monsieur Van Bromen was himself going out to dinner, according to his



habit on Thursdays, and that the cook need not trouble about him that evening. At that moment the man sent by the telephone service was calling the exchange for a test.

No noise had been heard by the neighbours during the evening, and it was only the next morning, when the valet went to his master's room as usual to call him, that he found the bed still untouched and his master's evening clothes lying on the chair, where he had placed them in readiness the day before. Alarmed and vaguely sensing evil, Gustave had gone to the study. The door was locked on the inside and no answer came to his repeated knocking. Joined by the butler, he had called in a 'sergent de ville,' a policeman, and broken open the door. The first thing they saw was the unfortunate Van Broman lying dead before the safe.

The policeman had tried to telephone to the nearest hospital, but did not manage to get through to the exchange, and thereupon he had suddenly become unaccountably angry and had rushed out of the room, nearly knocking the butler over.

Whilst these statements were being taken down by the 'greffier,' the investigating officer's clerk, Bannister and I examined the telephone. This was one of the French table kind, with receiver and microphone in one piece, shaped like the letter 'C,' and which rests horizontally on a double hook.

Lifting this carefully, I at once became aware of a vague odour that came from it. There was no doubt — faint traces of the same perfume with which the

handkerchief that Bannister had brought to my room was impregnated, still lingered on the mouth-piece. Measuring the round ebonite rim, I found that it corresponded in size to the dirty round stain which I had noticed.

Some subtle and uncanny crime had evidently been perpetrated here. Dimly my friend and I began to sense the truth, but it was no use discussing it as yet. Outside in the passage were newspaper reporters, and there was nothing we desired less than to let the criminal know that a crime was suspected.

As soon as the judge had finished his examination, he gave orders for the body to be removed for the necessary post mortem, and we all left together. Seals were placed on the outside of the door leading to the study, which could be broken only by a special permit. This I decided to obtain.

In the meantime, at my suggestion, Bannister went to the general post-office in the Rue du Louvre, with the intention of finding out who the man was who had been sent to repair the telephone, and what calls had come through to Van Broman in the afternoon between five and eight, on the preceding day. It was arranged that we should meet later at my room and compare results.

When I returned, I found Lebrun waiting for me, in his hand was a paper covered with notes; on the table stood the jar containing the handkerchief.

‘Eh bien,’ I said, ‘have you discovered what it is?’

‘No, monsieur,’ Lebrun answered, ‘but this is the result of my work. The spot where the poison is

strongest has been used to wipe a telephone mouth-piece. There is a distinct reaction for human saliva, such as condenses there from the breath. I also found a few microscopic grains of ebonite, showing that the mouthpiece was new and badly made, since it was rough. The saliva is only some twelve hours old. It still reacts to iodine vapours. The odour is probably that of a vegetable oil, but may be from an animal. It is, however, unknown to me. Its effect seems to be a stimulation of that part of the brain which is situated just behind the ears and believed to control our brute instincts. It acts in much the same way as absinthe taken in very large quantities. I imagine that when fresh, it will swiftly produce madness, then a state of coma, and perhaps even death. The oil acts entirely by impinging on the delicate nerves of the throat and nose. It is otherwise quite tasteless.'

'Merci,' I said, smiling. 'That is a very fine report, but it does not help much.'

'No,' said Lebrun, shaking his head. 'But if you will pardon me, I have heard that there is a spider, found in Indo-China, a spider as large as a tarantula, which has the power of giving off a spray or odour when alarmed. This vapour will kill small birds and snakes. When inhaled by man, it produces a species of madness and sometimes even suicidal mania.'

'How do you know this?' I enquired.

'Oh, monsieur knows that I have been many years in the East. Of course I believe it to be only a tale. I have never seen this spider, but still — one never knows.' Bowing courteously, Lebrun withdrew.

I at once set to work on my negatives. Until late that evening I was busy developing, and as I worked so my wonder grew! There were so many good impressions. Too many, in fact. It was as if the criminal had desired to leave a trace everywhere.

I waited eagerly for the negatives to fix and wash, then, soaking them in formaline and methylated spirits, I dried them in haste. It was very unprofessional, and I don't know what Dr. Bertillon would have said had he known of it, but I was eager to see if these lines and circles, so potent in their power and meaning, were all made by the same person.

Soon I had some of them under the microscope — one by one I examined them all —

A dull sensation of cold took possession of my nerves. Was it all imagination? Every one of these finger-prints had been made by the dead man himself. Again and again I compared them. There was no mistake possible; for I had taken care to obtain clear mouldings of Van Broom's hands before the doctor touched the body.

Finally, although the hour was late, I could contain myself no longer. Going to the telephone I was about to ring up Bannister when the bell shrilled. Lifting the instrument I heard the voice of the very man I so much desired to speak to.

'Don't waste time, old fellow,' I said to him. 'Come along. I've extraordinary news for you.'

'So have I,' he replied. 'I'll be along at once.'

As soon as he arrived, I took him to my dark-room and showed him the negatives. He examined them very carefully. I then gave him the report of Lebrun.

He said nothing much, but, after reading it, followed me back to my room.

We sat down in silence and lit cigarettes. 'Well,' was his remark, after blowing smoke-rings until I was ready to throw something at him, 'this merely confirms what I thought. Van Bromen may not have been killed, in the way *we* understand it, but Shan is at the bottom of it all and has the diamonds, I feel sure of that. Listen to what I have done. But first, can you get some sandwiches, for I've eaten nothing and, by the look of you, you haven't either?'

Only then I became aware that I was intensely hungry. I had not eaten anything since breakfast. Soon we were devouring what I had found — some bread, sardines, cheese, and a bottle of wine.

'Now,' said my friend, after lighting a fresh cigarette, 'listen to me. The post-office sent no one at all to see to the telephone. They received a complaint from Van, but it is not the custom in Paris to send as late in the afternoon as that. They have since tested the line and say that nothing is wrong with it. I called at the exchange Gutenberg — Van Bromen's number is connected there — and they tell me that yesterday afternoon someone constantly called his number, from a café near by, it appears, but as soon as Van Bromen replied, the caller would ring off. This it was that led the unfortunate man to complain.

'Point one, therefore, is that the man who came and whom no one saw go was not an employee of the post-office. Now your Lebrun report speaks of a new and rough mouthpiece. It is probable that he



brought this with him, and that it had been prepared with the poison. We'll find out to-morrow how long it is since Van had his telephone installed or changed. I then went to the head official of the telephone exchange and he very obligingly enquired of the supervisor if calls had come through for Gutenberg 9036, the number of the dead man, on Thursday between five and eight. Two had been registered. The first at six o'clock from Passy. The other from a café near the Saint-Lazare railway station; both conversations seem to have taken place between six and seven.

'Now let us suppose that the man who came to see to the telephone placed a poisoned mouthpiece on it. Van Broman is then called to the telephone. The odour disgusts him, and he wipes the instrument with his handkerchief. The poison has, however, done its work; a fit of madness seizes the unfortunate man, during which he dashes frantically about the room and breaks most of his furniture. He attempts to reach his safe, but dies in front of it.'

'Yes,' I said sarcastically. 'Then the dead man very obligingly gets up, unlocks the safe, hands the diamonds to the unknown telephone mechanic, lets him out, locks and bolts the door again, injects morphia into his left arm, and lies down to die once more. Either that, or the diamonds are still in the safe and Van Broman was alone in the room when he died. You cannot ignore the salient facts. The door was locked and bolted *on the inside*. The window, too. There is no cupboard, chimney, or hiding-place in the room, nor any other way in or out. You have

just seen for yourself that no finger-prints other than those of the dead man have been found anywhere. Even those on the safe handle are his. The odour on the handkerchief must be either a curious coincidence or else it caused Van Bromen to commit suicide — Colbert and the doctor are sure that he died by his own hand. Why that poison was sent to him I cannot conceive.'

'I think I know,' said Bannister gravely. 'I am certain that the diamonds are gone. I have seen and spoken with Dr. Poirot, his physician. He tells me that for the last month Van Bromen has been as a man obsessed. Poirot attended him regularly. Van Bromen was haunted by the fear of becoming insane. At first he thought himself watched and threatened by an enemy. Then lately he had arrived at a stage where he was in deadly terror of committing a crime himself; he constantly spoke of fits of homicidal mania, in the evening especially. When he was alone in his study, reading his letters — *note that — reading his letters*. He was even afraid to ring for his valet, for he felt that the sight of a human being would drive him to frenzy and to murder. Several times he spoke of taking his own life, although he had no reason for doing so. We know that Van Bromen was rich, very rich, and his reputation excellent. Does that convey anything to you? The doctor told me that he minutely described his fancies and dreams to him, and that they were terrible some of them. Through them all runs the theme of fear and violence. Dr. Poirot also believes that he committed suicide whilst insane; you and I know

better. Constant slow poisoning must have been systematically carried out, and he was driven to take his own life. It is the favourite method of Hanoi Shan. That poison came from him.'

'How?' I asked.

'Why, his letters, of course; one of them must have carried some trace of the evil drug to him every evening, until he was in such a condition that the final concentrated inhalation was sufficient to produce insanity. Now we can do no more to-night. To-morrow we shall know the result of the medical experts' examination and the safe also will be opened.'

So saying, Bannister rose and wished me good-night. I did not go to bed, however, before writing out a long report for my department.

The next morning I received a note from Dr. Bertillon, asking me to come at once.

When I entered his flat on the first floor, I found that Bannister was already there, also Monsieur Colbert. The latter looked very much troubled.

'I no longer think that you wasted your time, mon ami,' he said to me, as I came in. 'The safe has been opened. It was empty, although we know now that the consignment of diamonds was there just before four o'clock on the day Van Broman was killed.'

'Was killed,' I said. 'Then you have discovered how he died?'

'No,' interrupted Bannister, 'but we know how he did *not* die. The morphia was injected by someone when poor Van was already dead. A few minutes too

late. It was clever, but just not clever enough. The medical report is positive on that point.'

'Now, monsieur,' said my chief to me, 'let me read your report, and then I will see the result of your investigation.'

I told my chief all Bannister and I knew and suspected. Handing him the report I had written before going to bed, I added, 'Hélas, monsieur, there is not a single trace in all my work that anyone but the dead man has been in the room.'

Dr. Bertillon listened gravely without saying a word and afterwards read my report slowly twice through. For some minutes he was lost in thought, then, rising, he said:

'Allons, messieurs! Let us first see and examine the prints, photographs, and measurements. Also I will look at your poisoned handkerchief. Then, if there is nothing that you may have overlooked, we will go to the Boulevard Malesherbes.'

One by one the various photographs were examined. Slowly and methodically he scanned them all. No one spoke. Both Bannister and I felt that the moment was critical.

Suddenly my chief said: 'In several of these enlargements I do not see any trace of the sudaripores that are the characteristic of a human finger-print. Give me your microscope.'

Again he examined them with my most powerful instrument.

'I am very disappointed in you, Monsieur Ashton-Wolfe,' he said at last, turning with a frown. 'You have learned, or I thought you had, that the impress

of the ridges becomes visible because of the tiny pores in the skin, through which the perspiration, the natural moisture of the hand, passes. Of these there are always from one hundred and fifty to four hundred per phalange visible. Here, in these five, there are none at all. Also you have there two finger-marks taken from the handle of the safe, which obviously must be made by one hand, yet they are the impressions of the first finger of a right hand and the third finger of a left hand; look for yourself.'

Bannister and I said nothing, but, through the wave of shame which overcame me at this reproof, a flood of wild hope came thrilling. We were right then — it *was* murder and not suicide.

Together we again examined all our evidence, Dr. Bertillon pointing out what I had missed.

At last he smiled and said; 'Well, I am glad it happened; you will not forget the lesson. Come, now, we will go, the three of us, to the Boulevard Malesherbes. I see that for the sake of my own reputation as a teacher, I must save that of my pupil.'

Timidly I asked: 'How, then, monsieur, were these marks made?'

'Probably gelatine or wax moulds, moistened by breathing on them. For the actual work the murderer must have worn rubber gloves, leaving no trace of his own hands. It remains to be seen whether he wore them *all* the time.'

At the flat of Van Bromen a policeman guarded the door, but he saluted and stood aside when he saw the famous criminologist. Once again in the room, we shut ourselves in.



For an hour Dr. Bertillon examined every surface with powerful lenses, without result. At last he came to a curtain of heavy velvet which was draped before a recess near the door. He pointed to marks on one side of it.

‘Velvet creases so easily,’ he said, with a satisfied smile. ‘Before we do anything else, let us loop the curtain up with a piece of string.’ When this was done, he pointed to the floor.

‘Luckily the servants did not dust behind here too often. A man sat behind this curtain for hours. See where the round mark shows in the dust. There is the imprint of his heels — he squatted with his hands clasped around his knees, and here’ — with a triumphant gesture he pointed to the complete shape of a hand in the dust — ‘is where he placed his hand to get up, and steadied himself by placing that same dirty hand on the wall; *and he no longer wore gloves.*’ Naturally, his evil work done, he stripped off the rubber gloves. The wait was a long one and he probably dozed. When the valet came and knocked, he arose, stiff and cramped, but ready to escape the instant the door was opened. He must have been startled and the thought never came to him to put on the gloves again. Now we have him! To work, mon ami, we cannot risk having the marks effaced; you must use magnesium.’

When I had finished and we were about to go, Bannister stooped and picked up a small scrap of paper that had been wedged between two floor boards.

This had probably slipped out of the man’s

pocket, whilst sleeping and waiting through the night, shut in with the man he had killed. It would have passed unnoticed but for the brilliant light of the magnesium. On it was a curious cypher:

‘?9;’8:@589:9¼%/¼3 rui 43:33.’

This had been typed — I had seen the same trick before. It was merely done by locking the shift key for figures and signs, and then writing the required words.

In order to translate it, one has only to discover what kind of machine was used and then rewrite it normally. This we did on returning. The message was:

‘Combination of safe 478 Renee.’

The photographs I had taken were at once enlarged and sent to the finger-print department.

Two hours later a messenger from the Sûreté brought us a ‘fiche.’ On it was the following information:

‘Cordoni — Italian — born — Naples — French mother — forty years old — electrician by trade — four convictions for house-breaking — wanted.’

Then followed a long description, likely haunts, friends, etc. More information than we required.

Cordoni! One of Hanoi Shan’s lieutenants! Now at last we were on the right track.

‘Explanations can wait,’ Bannister said. ‘First we must get our man.’

We knew that as yet Cordoni and the others, who had apparently remained faithful to Hanoi Shan,



Nom et prénoms *Cordoni*  
 Né le *12/4/1876* à *Imperia* cant. *St. Paul* dep. *St. Paul*  
 Fils de *Mario* et de *Antonia* Prof. *St. Paul*  
 Surnoms *Cordani* Motif de la détention : *Vol*

Marques particulières et cicatrices

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>I. <i>la cic. g. de la</i><br/><i>1/2</i></p> <p>II. <i>pour la cic. g. de la</i><br/><i>1/2</i></p> | <p>III. <i>la cic. g. de la</i><br/><i>1/2</i></p> <p>IV.</p> <p>V. <i>la cic. g. de la</i><br/><i>1/2</i></p> <p>VI.</p> |
|---|---|

MAIN GAUCHE :

Auriculaire g.      Annulaire g.      Médus g.      Index g.      Pouce g.

*Talons' coeur et femme sur os. Br gauche.*

FICHE, OR POLICE CHART, OF CORDONI WHEN HE WAS ARRESTED FOR BURGLARY



would be quite unsuspecting that any foul play was suspected. The papers had all given the doctor's first opinion of suicide as the definite explanation of Van Broman's death. Good care was taken that nothing of our discoveries leaked out. We knew Shan himself, however, and that he would act as if he were suspected. It was his way.

The police headquarters of all the ports and frontier stations were warned and descriptions circulated. Detectives at once began searching everywhere where diamonds are bought and sold: at Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hatton Garden in London. The net was stretched for days, but in vain.

Then one evening a long-distance call came from Marseilles. A man answering to the description of Cordoni had been arrested in a café near the busy port, where the big steamers come in from the East.

Waiting for nothing, Bannister and I caught the next south-bound express. We arrived at five in the morning and raced to the *commissariat*, where the man was held.

It was Cordoni! He had grown a moustache and beard since we last saw him, but we knew him again and he knew us.

He grinned with rage when we entered. He had evidently intended to travel when he was arrested, for his short, lithe, athletic figure was clothed in elegant tussore silk, such as travellers to the East wear.

'A lot of trouble you take just to have a man arrested for burglary,' he snarled at us.

We had gone through the list of things found on



the man when he was searched. Several thousand francs in gold and notes had been in his possession, but no diamonds. We guessed, therefore, that he did not for a moment apprehend any trouble from his murderous exploit, and his remark confirmed this. We intended to make the most of his ignorance of our real purpose.

We had to wear him down in order to obtain the information we wanted, for we hoped to find the Spider this time, and we knew beforehand that it would be a long and wearisome tussle. Cordoni, we were certain, was only a tool.

Much has been said about the third degree, but really it is only a battle of wits and will-power. For hours we questioned him, never letting him suspect what we knew. Then suddenly I said:

‘When the door of Van Broman’s flat was broken down, you slipped out from behind the curtain where you had waited. We know you put the poisoned mouthpiece on the telephone. We know you injected the morphia when Van Broman was unconscious. Shan has confessed it. You are a fool to shield him. He says you did it all; it was your idea.’

‘Liar!’ Cordoni yelled, taken off his guard. ‘Shan is on his way to Suez. He ——’ Then he stopped, pale and trembling.

I gave him no time to recover. ‘Suez — rubbish! He told you that, to rob you of your share of the diamonds. He was arrested at Genoa and confessed at once, throwing all the blame on you. Why, he even gave us this note which he sent to you and told us what it means.’

With that I showed him a copy of the scrap of paper Bannister had found.

‘Come; unless you want to feel the knife of the guillotine on your neck, you will tell us what we want to know. Otherwise Shan will be a witness for the prosecution and you will be sentenced on his evidence.’

The sight of the note was the last straw; Cordoni believed that the Spider had been caught. His resistance was at an end. The tale was not long, but it confirmed all that we suspected.

The Spider had only been wounded when we had surrounded and attacked the den in the Rue Lhomond. He had never left Paris. Safely hidden in a retreat which he reached by boat, up the river Seine, Hanoi had plotted several crimes from there, which others had carried out with success.

Then, when he was informed of the valuable consignments of diamonds that constantly came to Van Bromen’s house, he had conceived a means of obtaining them, at the same time making the crime look like suicide. During several weeks letters slightly impregnated with a certain juice that Shan possessed (what it was Cordoni did not know, but he believed that it came from the East) had been sent to Van Bromen, until the unfortunate man began to believe that he was becoming insane.

Finally, Thursday, arrangements had been made for the servants to be away the whole evening. Both the invitation to the butler and the letter carried by Gustave were part of the plot. The telephone was

then set ringing in order to cause Van Broman, already irritable and ill, to complain. Cordoni called as an employee of the post-office and, taking off the mouthpiece, had replaced it by the one Shan had given him. It had been agreed that, as soon as Van Broman was called to the telephone by a bogus message, Cordoni was to lock the door from the inside and hide.

No doubt the poison alone would have killed Van Broman, or caused him to take his own life, but this would not have enabled Shan to obtain the diamonds. Therefore, Cordoni had been ordered to wait in the room until Van Broman was dead. Shan had told him that the poison on the telephone would kill the victim, but, to make quite sure, when he was unconscious, he was to inject morphine into his arm and leave the syringe and bottle where they would be found. He was also given rubber gloves to wear and a series of little gelatine pads with which to touch any likely surface, so as to leave the dead man's finger-prints behind. Shan had obtained these in his own way; how, Cordoni did not know.

The poisonous emanation did not at once render Van Broman unconscious. Instead, it had stimulated and maddened him. For a long time he had raved and dashed about the room fighting imaginary enemies. He it was who had smashed the chairs and torn the pictures from their frames and finally he had fallen down where he was found. Cordoni admitted that he had been terrified lest someone should come, and waited for some time behind the curtain,

ready to slip out. At last he had taken heart and carried out the orders given to him by Shan. The combination of the safe had also been furnished by the Spider.

Then, with the parcel of stones in his pocket, Cordoni had settled down for his long vigil until the door should be broken open.

This last touch of genius was characteristic of the Asiatic. He had calculated that when the door, which opened inward towards the curtained recess, was forced, the terrified servants would leave it open and give his man a chance to escape; and, since their evidence would prove that it had been locked and bolted on the inside, a verdict of suicide would certainly follow.

Cordoni and Shan had taken the train to Marseilles the next day and there they separated. It had been arranged that they should rejoin each other in Shanghai and share the loot. Shan was too wily to leave such terrible evidence as any of the diamonds with his tool.

So soon as we knew the name of the ship which Shan had taken, we telegraphed to the various authorities.

It had been a close shave, but we were just in time!

When the ship entered the harbour at Naples, the Italian police boarded the boat and, forming a cordon, prevented anyone from leaving. There were several Orientals on board, and these were all searched. Inside the crown of a pith helmet which one of them, who was a hunchback, was wearing,

they found the bag of diamonds. He was immediately arrested and taken to the cells. So at last we had this yellow fiend.

Cordoni was at once sent to Paris under escort in a special carriage, charged with complicity in the death of Van Broman, and with theft. Bannister and I left Marseilles the same day for Italy in order to identify Hanoi Shan and to comply with the extradition formalities.

We were both tired out, but bodily fatigue and want of sleep were fully compensated by the satisfaction we felt at having so successfully checkmated the escape and triumph of the Spider and his evil companions. We hoped, too, that, with the leader and his helpers under lock and key, we should perhaps wring confessions from them which would clear up other unsolved crimes.

We had ample leisure now for twenty hours, whilst the train was rushing along the smiling, sunny Mediterranean coast, to talk over the events of the past few days.

The statement Cordoni had made fully confirmed the results achieved by our patient investigation. It had been taken down and signed by him before we left, and was now in my pocket. With it Bannister and I hoped to force a confession from the wily Shan.

At Genoa a member of the Italian police joined us. We explained the whole case to him. He eagerly listened while I expounded the wonderful work of Dr. Bertillon. When we came to the discovery behind the curtain, he stopped me.

‘How, then, did Signor Bertillon know that the



man had waited there long hours — the marks in the dust would not tell him that?’

‘No?’ I rejoined. ‘Well, you see if you can sit in a small recess in a squatting position for many hours and then get up suddenly, without dropping your right knee and hand to the ground to regain your balance. Then you would instinctively reach up with your right hand for a support of some kind above your head in order to pull yourself up. There were all the traces of this. You see, Dr. Bertillon reasoned that the kind of man who commits such a cold-blooded crime is generally an athlete. Had he been there only a few minutes, he would have arisen by the strength of his thighs. The Paris apache has particularly strong legs.’

‘Si, si,’ said our Italian friend, ‘that is true. They fight with their feet, do they not? What you call “la savate,” the foot-boxing?’

‘They do,’ said Bannister, grinning reminiscently, when I had translated. ‘You tell our colleague from Naples that it beats any other kind of fighting for deadly work.’

‘Benissimo,’ the Neapolitan went on admiringly; ‘but how small were the mistakes this man made!’

‘The greatest mistake was that he did not see what Van Bromen did, while he was locking the door,’ I replied. ‘Van Bromen wiped the telephone with his handkerchief; thus he did not collapse at once, and the smell, which would have been gone from the hard mouthpiece by morning, remained on the linen clutched in his hand. Otherwise it is probable that we should have all accepted the suicide theory. We

should have thought that the diamonds had been hidden or converted by the victim. You see this Oriental never intended to sell the diamonds in Europe. Probably he knew who would buy them in the East or even in San Francisco. It was the wiping of the telephone, too, that caused the poison to penetrate the pores of the hand in which Van Bro-men clutched the handkerchief — making him dangerously mad for a long time. Thus Cordoni was frightened and did not inject the morphia until too late, when the heart's action no longer distributed it through all the arteries. Finally, the criminal should not have worn rubber gloves — they become so painful after a time, this was what Dr. Bertillon counted upon when he said, "Let us see if he wore them *all* the time."

Thus chatting, we arrived at Naples at last.

A crushing disappointment awaited us. The man who had been arrested was truly a Malay, but he was not Hanoi Shan. Worse still, he had been taken to the hospital in a dying condition, and never recovered consciousness. The Italian surgeon informed us that the man had swallowed poison, probably cyanide, at the moment of his capture. He was quite unknown to us, but must without a doubt have been one of Shan's creatures.

Again the master brain had outwitted everyone by the supreme sacrifice of the diamonds. For it was the finding of these that had satisfied the Italian police that they held the right man, and so allowed Shan to slip away.

Sadly we returned home. We had Cordoni, it is

true, and also the diamonds, but Hanoi Shan was still at large.

‘Well,’ said Bannister, sighing, ‘the third time may be the lucky one — for us. Let us hope so.’

Cordoni was tried in Paris and sentenced to life-long detention in Noumea, the French penal settlement.

Hanoi Shan was finally killed years later by one of his own men, because he attempted to defraud them of their share of the huge sum obtained from the underwriters, for the salvage of a steamer which they had seized and which was reported to have been found derelict. Thus, unfortunately, he escaped the well-merited punishment of the guillotine.

The record of the case here described can be found in the ‘Chronique des Tribunaux,’ Paris edition, 1907-08, under the heading, ‘Procès de Cordoni — assassinat de Van Bromen, 3<sup>ième</sup> Cour d’Assizes. Procureur, Archimbaud. Défence, M.M. Labord et Henri d’Alberti.’

Which means:

‘Trial of Cordoni — murder of Van Bromen, 3rd Court of Paris Assizes. Prosecution conducted by Proc. Archimbaud. Defence by Maîtres Labord and Henry d’Alberti.’



## EPISODE X

MATA HARI, HINDOO DANCER AND SPY





## EPISODE X

### MATA HARI

#### HINDOO DANCER AND SPY

My good friend Monsieur Lorient, of the 'Journal,' had invited me to a mystic performance at that Parisian temple of the art, culture, and religion of India — the Musée Guimét. Only a chosen few besides those who were initiated disciples were to be allowed to assist at the first appearance of an authentic Bayadere of the pagoda of Kanda Swany. Her name was Mata Hari — 'The Dawn.'

A dusky attendant verified our cards and handed us a printed sheet on which was a prose translation of an Eastern poem. Lifting the heavy curtains, we became aware of a penetrating perfume resembling odorous sandalwood. Metal lamps of vague outline cast a soft radiance from their multicoloured glass facets. We had left the hubbub of the city behind us and could have believed ourselves transported to some far-away shrine of the Orient.

A close, oppressive silence reigned in this palace of Krishna, where Siva, the destroyer, sat menacing and motionless on an ebony pedestal, whilst on the stage, barely higher than the silk-covered floor, an immense golden Buddha stared stonily.

Suddenly a strange rhythm, coming seemingly from nowhere, pervaded the hall: a plaintive, minor wail of reed instruments, monotonous, dreamy,

eternal, that caused the skin to creep. The quality of the music was strangely disquieting; there was something of human suffering and revolt against fate in its notes. One had the queerest persuasion that the music never had a beginning and that it would never cease. I recognised the hypnotic strains of the snake-charmer's pipe. Whilst I sat there uneasily wondering what was to come, a huddled, shapeless mass of draperies heaped before the image of Buddha began to stir, slowly writhing, with a sinuous, undulating motion like a huge serpent. To my astonishment I saw the form of a beautiful woman materialise behind shimmering veils of gold and silver. Softly, almost imperceptibly, with infinite grace, she began to dance. One by one the enveloping veils were torn away, rising like flying birds or fluttering reluctantly to the ground, until the dancer stood before us, covered only with heavy glittering chains and necklets of gleaming stones. Then, with gliding step — floating rather than dancing — the legend of the black pearl, which had been explained to us before we entered, was unfolded with mystic symbolism.

'The Princess Anuba has learned that at the bottom of the sea there is a shell containing a wondrous black pearl. This jewel she desires a poor fisherman, whom she has encountered by chance, to obtain for her. He is terrified at the idea of affronting the fabulous monster who guards this pearl and devours all who attempt to rob him of the coveted treasure. But the Princess insists — imperiously at first, then voluptuously, languidly, pas-



MATA HARI





sionately, maddening the fisherman with her amorous glances and burning kisses, until at last, with sudden resolve, he plunges into the sea. He reappears, torn, bleeding, and dying, with the lustrous pearl in his hand, whereupon she triumphantly dances the dance of death, embodying the cupidity, cruelty, and capricious nature of a woman, who willingly accepts the sacrifice of a humble fisher's life, merely to satisfy a whim.'

This dance, marvellous in its exotic tragedy and realism, provoked thunderous applause. The second item was the snake dance, and truly, if it were possible for a sinuous reptile to enter the body of a woman, then the miracle was accomplished before my dilated eyes. Writhing, twisting, coiling, with arms, legs, and even the skin undulating and shivering with serpentine grace, Mata Hari glided over the oval stage, whirling ever more rapidly; until, in a quivering frenzy, she dropped once more in a huddled heap before the gilded image, where crimson draperies, fluttering down like flames, covered her panting form.

I left the Musée Guimét as in a dream; never in all my wanderings had I seen such subtle expressions of voluptuous languor conveyed by a simple rhythmic dance.

Some years later I was to see the same marvellous woman slowly step in the chill of dawn from a closed car, accompanied by a pale, trembling nun, and walk unconcernedly to a wooden post, where she faced unflinchingly a firing squad of French soldiers.

Disdaining the help of an officer, she herself placed around her waist the rope that was to bind her to the post. A smile was on her lips when with the flash of a sabre a sharp volley spat from the levelled rifles. A moment later, Mata Hari, dancer and spy, was but a quivering corpse, torn and shapeless. But the enigma of her strange personality and the fearful question — 'Was she guilty?' — still remain unsolved and unanswered.

There are two versions regarding the origin of Mata Hari. One is that which she herself often gave, when the wine — neither red nor white, but sparkling, which loosens the tongue of truth or stimulates the imagination to wild flights — had been flowing freely. Then she told her circle of admirers that she was born in a holy town of Malabar, called Jaffuapattam. Her father was a Brahman named Suprachetty and her mother Assirvadam, a Bayadere, a sacred dancer of the temple dedicated to Siva. When her mother died, in giving Mata Hari birth, the priests adopted her and dedicated her to the service of the temple Kanda Swamy. There she learned the ancient dances of the Kama Sutra.

This story is very pretty and poetical. Unfortunately, the truth is less romantic; for Mata Hari was born in the little Dutch town of Leeuwarden on the 7th of August, 1876. Her father, Mynheer Zelle, was a well-known, honourable Frisian merchant and her mother a wealthy Dutch aristocrat. Mata Hari was christened Gertrude Marguerite. At the death of her beloved mother, Marguerite was sent to a

convent, where she received the education which Mynheer Zelle considered compatible with the social position and the fortune of his only child.

It was during the holidays, which she spent with her father, that Marguerite, then barely nineteen, met Captain MacLeod, of Scottish family, an officer commanding the colonial troops in Java, the Dutch Indies. She fell madly in love with him and, since he was eligible in every way, although much older than the future Mata Hari, the father consented to the marriage. The wedding took place on the 30th of March, 1895, in Amsterdam. After a delicious honeymoon spent in Wiesbaden, the couple settled down to a quiet life, and the sister of MacLeod, Auntie Frida, a widow, became their housekeeper. From that moment commenced the calvary of the unfortunate and inexperienced girl who had given herself body and soul, together with a considerable fortune, to a man as heartless as he was violent and cruel. The sister, Auntie Frida, a morose and aggressive woman, forced them very quickly to leave the newly furnished house and take refuge in a flat in Amsterdam. Soon the captain ceased to show the least affection for his beautiful wife and began to spend his nights gambling away his own and her money. When it had all gone, he did not hesitate to send the unhappy girl to various friends, threatening her with dire punishment if she did not return with large sums.

All this one gleans from letters and memoirs published later by the father. Finally the captain was ordered to return to his duties in Java, and we next

hear of the sensation caused by the extraordinary beauty of his young wife among the natives. Here real tragedy came to sadden the unfortunate mother. Her son Norman was wilfully poisoned by a native nurse; the reasons for this deed have never transpired. Little by little life became one continuous series of quarrels until finally the chivalrous captain even horsewhipped his wife and threatened her with his revolver if she did not consent to a divorce. This divorce was granted in Amsterdam, where the persecuted girl had sought a refuge. At last Marguerite was free again, and we next find her in Paris, where she became the Hindoo dancer, Mata Hari.

Now here is a problem for psychologists and those who believe in Buddhistic reincarnation. Marguerite Zelle was of pure Dutch descent, her parents were Dutch, and could trace their ancestry back for several generations; yet Gertrude Marguerite — Mata Hari — was without the shadow of a doubt Asiatic, in features, body, and soul. Was it the power of auto-suggestion? Is it possible that merely because she steeped herself in the lore of India, and learned the language and dances of that land of mystery, that a metamorphosis was accomplished, and that the staid Puritan, provincial in her thoughts and education, was able within a few months to spread her wings, and, like a beautiful butterfly emerging from its chrysalis, to become transformed into a capricious courtesan and a graceful exponent of the sacred dances of Siva? Whatever the means she employed to bring about this transformation, it is certain that it took place. Even at

Saint-Lazare, the woman's prison, where Mata Hari was placed in the famous cell number 12, in which Madame Caillaux and Madame Steinheil spent their days awaiting that trial which sent them both out into the world, free once more, the medical officer, Dr. Bizard, was struck by the Oriental appearance and even the exotic nature of the former Marguerite Zelle.

After her initial triumph at the Musée Guimét, she quickly became one of the most adulated stars of the gay city. Financiers, diplomats, prime ministers, princes, and even reigning monarchs hastened to her laden with offerings and honours, which they heaped at her feet for a smile, a word, or a few hours of her precious favours. One of her admirers was the Crown Prince of Germany, although Mata Hari once said to me that this was more a proof of bad taste on her part than anything to be proud of. Another was the Duke of Brunswick and Monsieur Van der Linden, the prime minister of her native Holland. Her lovers were legion and belonged to all the walks of life. For a long time a French Minister was suspected of also having been one of the extraordinary woman's admirers and was banished for this when the war came and Mata Hari was arrested as a spy. Letters were found in her possession, written on the official paper of the Republic and signed 'My.' Only lately has it been finally proven that the mysterious 'My' was not the Minister.

I saw Mata Hari again at a soirée given by the Chilean Ambassador, where she danced several of her wonderful rhythmic poems. Draped in a saffron-



coloured veil, two hemispheres of gold and precious stones covering her breasts, she danced languorously to music specially composed for her, and so perfect was her rendering of the dances of India that even young Hindoo students were deceived and believed her to have been initiated in some far-away mystic pagoda. This time I had the pleasure of being presented to Mata Hari after the performance, and was later admitted to the circle of her friends. She who had come to Paris unknown and poor, only in order to escape the brutality and tyranny of that Captain MacLeod, her husband, now lived in a beautiful house in the Champs Elysées and possessed servants, jewels, and carriages.

A strange and fantastic being was Mata Hari!

I remember a fête given in her honour at the palace of the Duchess of Eckmüll. At the conclusion of the dinner, the heavy, sombre, purple curtains draped across one end of the hall slowly rose, disclosing Mata Hari kneeling humbly before a huge grotesque idol of bronze. As though obeying the irresistible call of the flutes and hautbois of the hidden orchestra, her body quivered with a slow, continuous shudder. From her head, crowned with dark, shining tresses, to her tiny feet with gilded nails, a wave, a vibration, rather, seemed to glide like a ripple under the skin. Apparently without effort, as the cobra rears its hood ready to strike, her body rose, dilated, stretched, until Mata Hari was revealed in all her beauty. But for the golden shells on her breasts and the heavy chains of metal and flashing gems, she was nude, entirely nude. Yet that

nudity had nothing that shocked — nothing that awakened the thought of a woman of flesh and blood.

Turning again to the grinning idol, the Bayadere bent her supple form in a low obeisance, and with a dreamy smile on her lips she loosened a large bracelet of jade from around her left wrist and threw it with a sweep of her arm to the fascinated guests; where the circle of jade had been there appeared a blue, twining snake tattooed on the amber-coloured skin. Then she began to dance!

A mystery, indeed, was this woman; no one has been able to explain the undoubted authentic Orientalism of Mata Hari. There was never a drop of Eastern blood in the veins of any of her family, who were all staid, commonplace Hollanders — and provincials at that. How is it, then, that this daughter of the buxom matrons of Rembrandt and Rubens became at will the incarnation of all that the Orient embodies? Even her eyes, although by day truly blue, the blue of the cornflower, were black, black as night, when she danced.

Hypnotism? — Who can say?

Then came the war — and with it the shadowy hand of Fate stretched out and marked her as one of the victims of the frenzy that had seized upon the world. On the day of the declaration of hostilities, Mata Hari was in Berlin and drove through the streets thronged with the yelling, excited crowds, seated in a carriage beside the chief of police, Von Jagow. This was, of course, noted by French agents

and Mata Hari was entered in the books of the Sûreté as a suspect. Notwithstanding the danger of such a step, she came to Paris via Holland and England, and for a time lived peaceably in her beautiful villa at Neuilly. In 1915 she obtained a permit to travel to Vittel, where one of the large hospitals for wounded officers was established. Here she met a Captain Marov, of the Russian army, who was blinded by the explosion of a mine.

For the first time in her life the 'danseuse rouge,' as the French had named her, really and truly loved. Pity is the twin sister of Love, and pity for the blind man soon became a fierce and devouring flame. For several months Mata Hari lived a beautiful and touching romance, tending and waiting on the unfortunate officer, and finally, in a moment of overwhelming passion, she vowed to marry him and devote her life to the man for whom life had become an eternal night. But first she must earn her dowry; a million francs, the dancer declared, was the sum which was required to place them both out of reach of the bony arm of poverty. A million francs! No small sum at that time! How was it to be earned? There was only one way. Mata Hari returned to Paris and offered her services to the chief of the French espionage in return for one million francs. Her offer was accepted on the condition that she travelled to Berlin and used her influence with German diplomats to obtain valuable information for the French army. Mata Hari left Paris at once, but was stopped before she reached Germany by a British cruiser and sent to Spain. She was now

without money, and, although she did not know it, constantly watched by the French contre-espionage, who observed to their surprise that Mata Hari resided at the principal hotel in Madrid, where she met the German naval attaché, Von Kalle, who appeared to be her intimate friend. He it was who brought about her downfall.

A wireless message, which he sent to Berlin, was intercepted and decoded by the Eiffel Tower. It was an order for the German secret service to pay the agent, H. 21, an important sum of money. The reply from Berlin was to the effect that the agent, H. 21, would receive fifteen thousand pesetas through the good offices of a neutral embassy, upon returning to Paris. Mata Hari, safe in Madrid, went to the Dutch Ambassador and asked for a passport to Paris. The Dutch official, who evidently suspected something, warned the dancer that it would be very dangerous for anyone to enter France unless perfectly innocent of any dealings with the enemy. Mata Hari feigned to be very angry and replied haughtily that her conscience was quite easy; she had done nothing wrong. The kindly official did not insist further and Mata Hari travelled to Paris. She was, of course, closely watched and followed wherever she went, and the secret service thus learned that the agent, H. 21, had received the fifteen thousand pesetas, and that this agent was — Mata Hari. The police at once received orders to arrest her. No doubt the dancer felt that she was in danger, for she called at the second office of the secret service department and explained that, owing to British inter-

ference, she had not been able to reach Germany, but that, if they would entrust her with another mission, she would try once more. This move did not save her from the inevitable consequences of her extraordinary carelessness.

One morning Monsieur Priollet, the chief of the special department of national defence, called at her house with three inspectors.

‘We have come,’ he said, ‘because the chief of the secret service requires your presence urgently.’

When she arrived at the headquarters of the second bureau, the officer in charge wasted no time in polite phrases, but asked brutally:

‘H. 21, tell us since when you are an agent in the pay of Germany?’

Mata Hari denied the implied accusation and stated that the money she had received was a present from her friend von Kalle, who was her lover. She was at once conducted to Saint-Lazare.

Although I was not allowed to visit her there, I have been able to reconstruct her life in that bleak prison from the report of the medical officer, and the story told by her good friend and able counsel, Maître Clunet, who believed in her innocence to the last.

Years have passed since that autumn morning when Mata Hari, cool, calm, and contemptuous as ever, walked across the execution ground at Vincennes dressed as for a lovers’ meeting and faced death. Yet the memory of that strange woman,



far from fading with the passing of time, has become more potent, more vivid than ever. Legend upon legend has twined itself around her forceful personality, and the question, 'Was she guilty?' still inspires writers and poets. Blasco Ibañez, in his 'Mare Nostrum,' Gomez-Carillo, Hirsch, the French playwright, and many others have woven a fantastic web around her tragic fate. I have nothing to do with these flights of fancy; I but wish to relate, as I know it, the trial and the end. It is strange, however, that, try how they may, official reports of the facts in the possession of the secret service have not succeeded in dispelling the doubt lingering in the minds of all who knew her; and to-day, when the sentiments of hate and bitterness of the great struggle have faded, to be replaced by logic and reason, the very emphasis laid upon her undoubted guilt by the officers who condemned her has awakened a painful feeling of uncertainty among the people. Such women as Tichelly, Otelia Moss, and others, whose blood also dyed the damp earth of Vincennes, have been forgotten as completely as though they had never existed; but Mata Hari, who, if guilty, cost the French a whole division, according to Mas-sard, the presiding judge, now looms in the minds of the public, if not as a martyr, at least as a mystery, an enigma — and as a painful lingering query. Why? Because she was beautiful and brave? There were others with similar qualities to whom press and public vouchsafed but a shrug of the shoulders. We British do not shoot women; we can, therefore, understand the better that feeling of secret horror

which must come to every man with the tiniest doubt. However, she died, and but lately even her jewels, and all the little trifles of her boudoir, were sold by public auction at the order of the State. Many were the men and women, shamefaced and shaken, who, with halting voice, hesitating lest they buy that which recalled the past to another, gathered together in the dingy room of the Salle des Ventes and bid for the pitiful relics.

The trial, or the court martial, rather, was staged in the Paris Assize Court. No one but the officials directly connected with the case were allowed inside. Sentries with fixed bayonets prevented anyone from approaching and a circle of thirty feet was drawn around the doors which no one could pass. Not a sound penetrated the sombre room, where grim battle-scarred soldiers, officers but lately returned from the front, were to judge and send to her death a woman whose smile was once sought by the greatest in the land.

Captain Massard, the prosecutor, a true soldier unversed in subtleties, refused to take into consideration the psychology, the loves, and the artistic triumphs of the dancer.

‘We cannot overlook the fact that you have received money from a German.’ The cold, deadly phrase is ever on his lips.

One feels it to be the only thing of import to him, and, notwithstanding his desire to appear impartial, it is only with difficulty that he succeeds in hiding his disdain.

Mata Hari, dressed in black, with a semi-military tricorne placed coquettishly on her black hair, was conducted to the bar — the French equivalent of the prisoner's dock — by two gendarmes, and given a seat.

Colonel Sempron, after reading the charge, then questioned the accused.

'On the day war was declared, you dined with the chief of the Berlin police and you were seen by his side driving through the streets?'

'That is true,' Mata Hari replied. 'I had met the prefect formerly, when I was dancing in Berlin, and we had become friends.'

'Quite so. Shortly after, the chief of the German secret service entrusted you with a mission and paid you thirty thousand marks?'

'It is true that he gave me thirty thousand marks, but not in payment of my services as a spy. He was my lover and the sum was a present.'

'We know already that he was your lover, but such a sum is surely an extraordinary present.'

'Not at all. I was never insulted by an offer of anything less than tens of thousands in return for my good friendship.'

'Well — we will not discuss that. From Berlin you came to Paris via Belgium, Holland, and England. What did you come to Paris for?'

'I came to reside in my house in Neuilly.'

'Soit. You then applied for a post as nurse and stayed seven months in the second military zone.'

'I fell in love with a poor unfortunate victim of the war, Captain Marov, who was blind, and I

hoped that, by devoting the remainder of my life to him, I might in some measure atone for my former sinful existence.'

Here the court was forced to acknowledge that Mata Hari was speaking the truth. This woman, who had lived solely for pleasure, whose whims were only to be satisfied by millionaires, and who had squandered fortune after fortune, remaining unmoved by the pleadings of all those who loved her, had suddenly become humble and tender with no thought for aught else than the man whom the war had robbed of his sight. Nor was it a caprice, for she wrote constantly to him from her prison cell, and her last letter on the morning of her death was for him.

So the terrible examination continued. To all the questions put to her why she was always seen with officers — aviators especially — she had but one reply, she loved the warrior, the man of mighty deeds. All other men were inferior to the soldier in her eyes. Yet slowly but surely Colonel Sempron and Captain Massard were breaking down her system of defence, or perhaps she was only weary. Mata Hari had but one reply to all the charges — the men with whom she corresponded were her lovers; and, after all, she was not French, why should she not correspond with a German, a Spaniard, or a man of any other country? At last, driven into a corner, she cried:

'Courtesan, yes, I admit I was that — but I was never a spy.'

Quietly now Captain Massard replied: 'Yet, when

you felt that you were watched, followed, and in danger of arrest, you offered your services to the French espionage.'

This time Mata Hari was silent — she realised her mistake. She — a Dutch subject — had accepted the position of secret agent for the French, which was as bad as to do so for the Germans. Of all the proofs brought forward by the prosecution, this was perhaps the only one which seems to me conclusive. Yet — the French accepted her services and sent her on a mission which gave her the opportunity to leave France. She reached Madrid, where she could have remained in safety; nevertheless, although well aware of her perilous position, she came back to Paris. Strange to say, Maître Clunet, her faithful friend, who fought a splendid losing fight, neglected this argument.

At last the verdict was read out to the accused. Guilty — and the sentence is death.

In the Saint-Lazare Prison, during the period which must elapse before the President of the Republic, after examining all the documents, can grant or refuse a reprieve, Mata Hari was a model prisoner. Shut in cell number 12 she spent her time reading books of Hindoo poetry. Two nuns were her constant companions, and one of them, Sister Marie, accompanied her to Vincennes at the last. Although Mata Hari was not pious, she listened willingly to their prayers. The only time when she showed any fear was the day on which her counsel was to come to her with the reply of the President to her plea for mercy. Towards the evening, the non-appearance of



the anxiously awaited messenger told her that no reprieve would be granted.

Sister Marie sat in a corner of the cell, sobbing. Suddenly Mata Hari sprang up and cried:

‘Sœur Marie, you have never seen me dance; well, dry your tears. I am going to dance for you alone.’

Throwing off her dress, she wrapped around her a gauzy veil which was amongst her clothes, and danced, danced, as she had never danced before; and the poor little nun, the tears still wet on her cheeks, stared, fascinated, at this dance of death, the last that Mata Hari, so full of life, would ever perform.

On the morning of the 15th of October, 1917, a group of men in black and officers brilliant in their uniforms passed along the corridor leading to cell number twelve. The kindly nuns had spread rugs and carpets on the floor to deaden the footsteps of these messengers of doom. Mata Hari was fast asleep, and her counsel, who had insisted on coming also, bent over and shook her gently. Then, when she was awake, he murmured a few words in her ear. To the horror and amazement of all present, instead of tears, shrieks, or hysteria, Mata Hari burst into a long, strident, hearty laugh. Shaking with merriment she gasped, ‘Non — non, it is too funny. Do you know, messieurs, what my kind-hearted counsel has just advised me to do — I am to say that I am pregnant, for a woman about to become a mother cannot be executed. But, no, I shall not seek such a subterfuge. If I am believed guilty, I will die with

no lie on my lips. Remember, a day will come when, too late, you will realise that I was innocent.'

Then, throwing back the bedclothes, she requested everyone to leave her cell while she dressed. To the doctor, who was also about to retire, she said: 'No, you are a doctor, you may remain.'

Slowly and without pose she asked the nun for her prettiest clothes. When about to choose a cloak, she turned to Dr. Bralez and said, 'What is the weather like?' Then, when he replied mechanically that it was a fine morning, she chose a light-coloured coat.

'I suppose,' she asked, when the officials had again crowded into the cell, 'that you will not shoot me without giving me something to eat and drink first.'

At a sign from the procureur, a bottle of rum, a lemon, and some hot water were brought. Without the least sign of agitation, the dancer prepared a stiff glass of grog with her own hands, and drank it slowly; then she rose. 'Allons, messieurs, I am sorry to have kept you waiting — I am ready.'

In the 'greffe' of the prison she wrote two letters with a firm hand, which she gave to Maître Clunet, requesting him to post them.

'Do not put them in the wrong envelopes,' she said, laughing, 'for one is to my daughter, the other to my lover, Captain Marov.'

Surrounded by cavalry with drawn swords, the car, containing the prisoner, the little Sister Marie, and her counsel, drove to the Polygone at Vincennes, where all spies sentenced in Paris were shot. She

was the first to descend from the car and held out her hand to the nun. Then with firm step she walked to the wooden post where so many lives had ended, and placed the rope around her waist, loosely knotting it herself. When Captain Bouchardon, the officer in charge of the firing squad, approached to bandage her eyes, she waved him away. Even the grim veterans who formed a double line along each side could hardly hide the tremor of their grey moustaches nor the moisture which came unbidden to their eyes. Kindly Sister Marie stood to the left of Mata Hari, sobbing convulsively. A sabre flashed — a crackling volley disturbed a few twittering sparrows, and Mata Hari crumpled and fell. There was no need for the *coup de grâce*. Death had been instantaneous.

So they played their parts — these men and women whose stories I have related, believing themselves free, unfettered, with a will of their own; free to choose their road, free to mould their own destiny! Vain puppets struggling in an invisible web, bound by a thousand gossamer threads, elastic, yet unyielding as steel, whose name is heredity, circumstance, environment, blind chance, and fate; fate, which is nothing but the action and reaction upon each other of the myriad human beings born on this earth, their every thought impinging like wireless waves on the sensitive human brain.

Like the quivering antennæ of the butterfly or ant, the ear, the eye, and the palate have been unconsciously registering, storing up impressions, since

the moment of birth; adding always to the race-memory which forms the 'ego' of every living thing. Those who come of strong and healthy stock may resist this constant bombardment of the senses victoriously, and serenely fight their way — it is their fortune, not their merit; but let there be the least warp in their fibre, and a stress, emotion, or shock may cause the balance of normality to cede — and tragedy results.

Always I look with awe upon the scarlet-robed men, with their white wigs, sitting coldly apart upon the throne of man's justice. Their fellows have armed them with the irresistible power of the law, of which their habiliments are the outward sign — they are the judges, infallible: that is the legend. I think of the unceasing stream of unfortunates who receive punishment at their hands, to whom the calm, level, passionless voice spells ruin, anguish, and despair, and I shudder. The community must protect itself, I know, but has it the right to punish?

As in a dream I hear a soft, sweet, far-away voice murmur, 'Let him who is without sin among you cast the first stone.'

THE END







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